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Using Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students

A Continuous Improvement Approach

NEW MEXICO
Public Education Department

Acknowledgments

This guide was developed by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest English Learners Partnership, a collaboration between REL Southwest and the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED)[1] for use by educators in New Mexico.

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[1] For more on the partnership, see https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/partnerships/swel.aspx.

Dedication to New Mexico educators

Dear New Mexico educators,

This guide and its accompanying document, *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*, were inspired by the tens of thousands of New Mexico students who are learning English as an additional language and whose diverse linguistic and cultural heritages and abundant knowledge enrich our scholastic environment immeasurably, and by the deep commitment of educators like you, who are focused on meeting the needs of these students and nurturing their academic growth and sociocultural development. The New Mexico Public Education Department, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education's Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, dedicates this guide to you, as educators, and has developed it with your needs and those of your students at its center.

In developing this guide, we and your fellow New Mexico educators who piloted and supported this work have been steadfast in our commitment to creating a resource that will enable you and your colleagues to optimally serve the state's English learner students. This guide invites you to participate in a process intended to promote a deeper understanding of your district's and your school's systems for serving English learner students and to help you test and adopt promising practices that may lead to equitable education outcomes for English learner students in your classrooms, schools, and districts.

With deep respect and appreciation,

The Development Team

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Preface

Providing high-quality programs and services to English learner students is an imperative for any education system committed to the well-being of all of its students and families, its local communities, and the state as a whole. The Language and Culture Division[2] of the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) supports this imperative by serving as the primary contact on implementing English learner programs and services that both meet federal requirements and leverage Title III funding to maximize opportunities and outcomes for students whose first language is one other than English or who are American Indian and live in an environment where a language other than English predominates.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice issued extensive joint guidance (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, & U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Division, 2015) focused on the need to ensure that English learner students can participate equitably and meaningfully in education programs. Three years later, in the 2018 case of *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico*, New Mexico's First Judicial District court ruled that the state had failed to offer all students the programs and services needed to prepare them for college and careers. To comply with the ruling, the state must ensure that its schools have the funding to meet this requirement. One of the four student groups named in the lawsuit was English learner students, a group that accounts for approximately 15 percent of the state's public school student population.

Initially, NMPED responded to the ruling with a tight focus on helping districts and state charter schools comply with federal and state policies regarding English learner students. In addition to providing technical assistance to districts and schools, NMPED developed the *Serving English Learners Technical Assistance Manual* (2018). The manual, which provides guidance, processes, and tools for identifying, supporting, and monitoring the growth of English learner students, is intended as the go-to reference for New Mexico districts and schools working to understand the "why," "when," and "how" of identifying and serving this student population (CCD, n.d.).

The *Serving English Learners Monitoring Checklist* (NMPED, Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau, n.d.) was developed, in turn, as a companion tool for the manual. It is intended to help districts and schools, including state charter schools, assess the quality of their services to English learner students in several categories (for example, identification and assessment of English learner students; parent notification; programs and services). Once a district has assessed its efforts in each checklist category, it may find that it needs to make some changes in policy and/or practice to achieve compliance.

While meeting federal, state, and court requirements is essential, NMPED recognizes that compliance must be the beginning, not the end, of serving English learner students. Seeking a way to help

[2] Prior to 2018, the Language and Culture Division was known as the Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau.

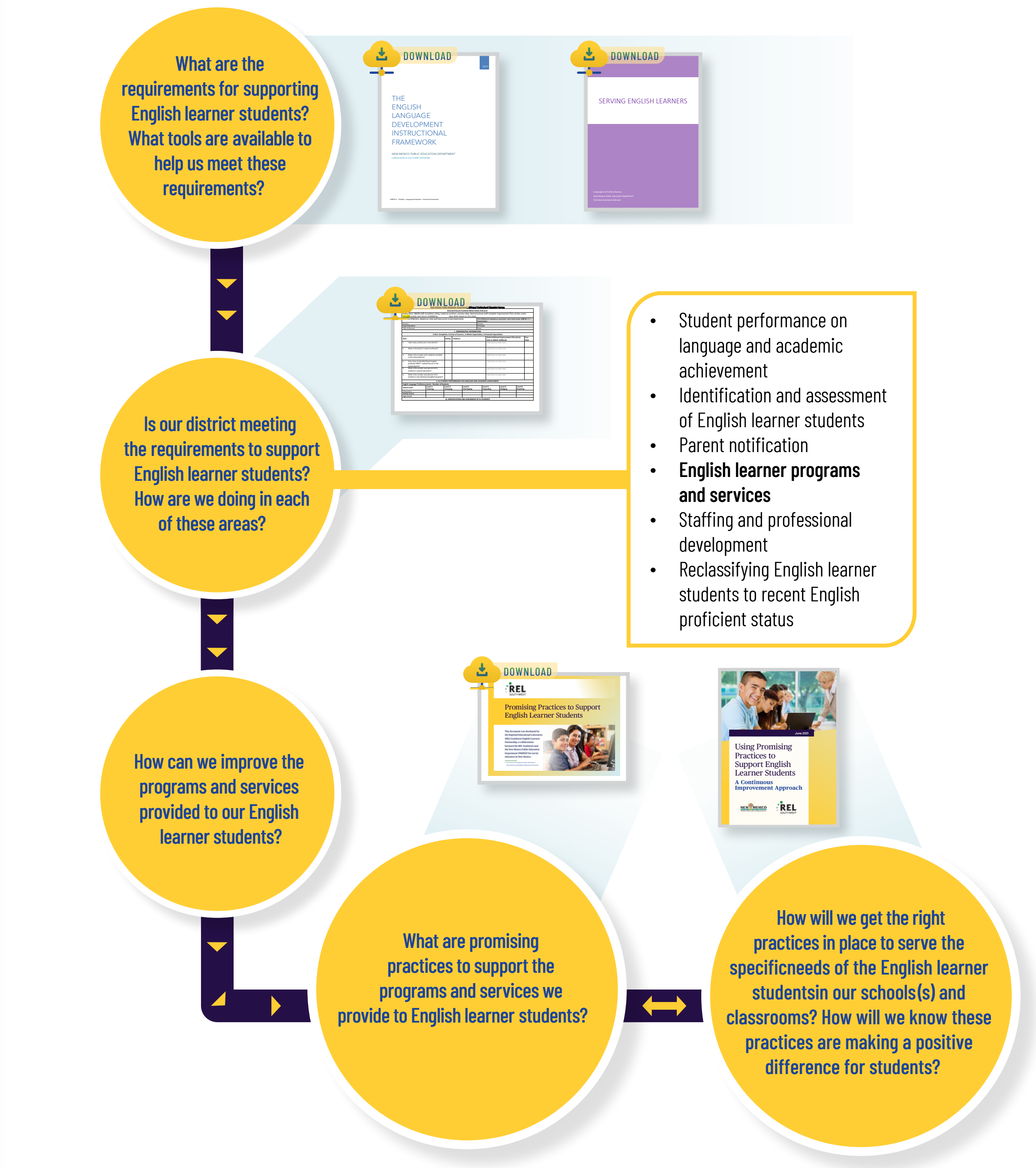
state educators to look beyond compliance in their work with these students, NMPED developed the *English Learner Development Instructional Framework* (2019). Further, the Southwest English Learners Partnership, a collaboration among the U.S. Department of Education's Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest, NMPED, and other education entities,[3] developed the document *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*, which focuses on one particular category from the *Serving English Learners Monitoring Checklist*: programs and services. *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* is a carefully curated collection of broad practices for strengthening English learner education programs and services, with one set of practices suggested for leaders and one set for teachers. Teacher practices are those typically within a teacher's locus of control (for example, collaborating with colleagues; changing an instructional approach in a classroom), while leader practices are those typically within the domain of a site or district leader (for example, establishing professional learning opportunities for teachers; cultivating school culture; identifying and adopting curricular and instructional materials). The practices were reviewed and vetted by experts from REL Southwest, by a strategic advisory group composed of leaders from New Mexico districts and NMPED, and by a committee of representatives from a cross-bureau team from NMPED and New Mexico districts.

Results from a pilot implementation of *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*, conducted by REL Southwest in three New Mexico districts, underscored the value of considering changes in practice through the lens of continuous improvement. That experience led to the development of this guide, the latest NMPED resource for educators serving English learner students. The guide provides a step-by-step process for deciding on, making, and testing a change in practice. That process starts with educators developing greater understanding about the particular education needs of their English learner students, then using *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* to identify which high-level promising practice(s) might best meet those needs in their particular context. An identified practice is then tested in rapid Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles, in which a change is piloted, results are analyzed, and, based on those results, the change is adopted and scaled, adapted and tested again, or abandoned in favor of an alternative change to test.

As shown in figure 1, the five NMPED resources—the manual, the instructional framework, the monitoring checklist, the practices document, and this guide—serve as an integrated set of improvement resources for districts and schools as they work to ensure that English learner students are given robust learning opportunities, including any necessary supports, that lead to equitable academic and social-emotional outcomes, so that these students leave school prepared and enthusiastic to enter postsecondary schooling or the workforce in pursuit of a meaningful career.

[3] For more on the partnership, see https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/partnerships/swel.aspx.

Figure 1. New Mexico's integrated resources for improving education for English learner students



Introduction

With an underlying emphasis on improving opportunities, not people, this guide is intended to support the state's educators in their ongoing efforts to optimize teaching and learning for students who are designated by New Mexico as "English learners" because they are acquiring English as an additional language. This guide introduces a continuous improvement process for identifying and implementing appropriate changes in practice, so as to better serve this population. In New Mexico, this population can include students who are American Indians, and students representing diverse national origins, home languages, education experiences in their homelands, immigration experiences, and settlement histories in the United States.

The fact that New Mexico classifies this population as English learners, with the emphasis on "learners," reflects an intent not to label or sort human beings, but to provide curricular programs and services that meet the unique educational needs of these students and advance their overall learning. The content of this guide reflects a reimagining of this student population as children and youths "who are becoming bilingual" (Dabach & Fones, 2016)—or, ideally, multilingual—and promotes an asset-based mindset with respect to serving these students.

Hereafter, this guide uses the term "English learner students," to align with the language used by the Institute of Education Sciences, which funded the projects that developed this guide.

Purpose and importance of the guide

For both legal and ethical reasons related to ensuring a high-quality education for English learner students, continuous improvement is critical for all education systems serving this student group. Continuous improvement is more than simply an aspirational goal or wishful thinking. In education, as in other fields,[4] it is a disciplined, methodical approach undertaken with the intent of achieving better outcomes. It can be used at various levels—in classrooms, schoolwide, or at the district level. According to Best and Dunlap (2014), "At the classroom level, continuous improvement may refer to using timely, accurate data to regularly inform and improve teacher practice. At a school or district level, continuous improvement may refer to ongoing efforts to improve operational practices and processes related to efficiency, effectiveness, and student outcomes" (p. 1).

[4] With roots in Japanese and U.S. manufacturing sectors, the continuous improvement approach was adopted by the health care industry in the late 20th century. Starting in the late 1990s, the approach has been adapted and used in the education realm.

Continuous improvement is data-driven, systems-focused, iterative, and integrated into everyday routines. When specifically applied to improving education for English learner students, it can help educators more fully understand the systems and contexts in which teaching and learning occur for this population. The continuous improvement approach described in this guide starts with investigating the root causes of persistent learning-opportunity gaps, and proceeds with choosing and testing changes in practice that are intended to eliminate the identified gaps. The overarching goal of this approach is to improve practices, programs, and services through a disciplined, methodical process. The guide is intended for use in conjunction with NMPED's *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* (see Box 1, "Using *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*").

Box 1. Using *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*

Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students, with which this guide is intended to be used, was developed for district, site, and teacher leaders who want to reflect on, evaluate, or enhance aspects of their programs and services in order to achieve equitable education outcomes for English learner students. It augments NMPED's *Serving English Learners Monitoring Checklist*, which itself aligns with federal and state policies on ensuring equal educational opportunities for these students. While the checklist addresses educational design and implementation for English learner students in eight categories, *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* and this guide concentrate on just one of those categories: programs and services. Within this category, *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* identifies four focus areas: equity, access, and engagement; instructional programs; instructional practices; and evaluating progress. Each focus area can be leveraged to create equitable, supportive, effective learning opportunities for English learner students.

For each focus area, *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* suggests two sets of broad promising practices—one for teachers and one for leaders—that are intended to strengthen education programs and services for English learner students. Importantly, these practices focus on adult behavior as the lever to drive improved opportunities and outcomes for English learner students. A key reason for including both teacher and leader practices is that efforts to ensure equitable learning opportunities for English learner students are best undertaken systematically; while positive changes made by one teacher, or even by many teachers, in their own classrooms may be beneficial to their respective students, such changes may be limited by the contexts in which they work. Moreover, opportunities for English learner students can be maximized when the broader school and district community is collectively engaging in positive changes in practice.

Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students also includes resources that were chosen to support educators in implementing the practices.

Using the guide

This guide is divided into three parts:

Part 1 provides a visual representation of the overall continuous improvement approach and its cycles, as applied to changes in practice that are intended to improve education for English learner students (figure. 2). It also provides estimates of needed time commitments.

Part 2 unpacks the steps outlined in Part 1. In addition to providing a step-by-step process for conducting each phase of a continuous improvement cycle, it offers suggestions for how to keep the needs of English learner students centered in the improvement process. Also, each section of part 2 identifies the New Mexico Data, Accountability, Sustainability, and High Achievement (NM DASH) component or components with which it aligns.

Part 3 illustrates the continuous improvement approach through two short hypothetical vignettes that correspond to each element of the approach. The vignettes depict potential situations involving improvement teams from two fictional schools. One is a team composed of school site teachers, staff, and administrators from Arroyo Elementary School. The other is a grade 7 teacher team from Piñon Middle School. The purpose of the vignettes is to provide additional contexts and examples of the approach described in this guide, so that guide users can have a more complete understanding of how a team might work through the steps in the continuous improvement approach.

Where to start

How best to read the guide depends on your time, needs, and preference:

- If you want to begin with a high-level picture of all of the steps in the continuous improvement approach, start with Part 1: Process map and time commitments on page 15.
- If you already have some knowledge of continuous improvement and want to jump into the "how-to" of the work, start with Part 2: The how-to of continuous improvement and helpful tools on page 19.
- If you prefer to begin with examples of how the continuous improvement approach may work in context before circling back to the guidance sections, start with Part 3: Continuous improvement in action on page 65, then circle back to Part 1 and/or Part 2.

A note on data

A continuous improvement approach is a data-driven process wherein improvement is understood through a system of measures tied to specific indicators that are tested over time. In this sense, a continuous improvement approach may be commonly understood as grounded in quantitative data analysis. However, in this user guide, the approach to continuous improvement also recognizes the importance of qualitative data, in the form of stakeholder voice and input, throughout the process, which must necessarily be engaged from the start of any project that seeks to advance an equitable education. For example, empathy interviews, observations, and analysis of artifacts such as student work are all considered significant data sources in continuous improvement methods. This guide has tools for using both quantitative and qualitative data, with the purpose of showing how different data sources can be used to answer different questions, allowing for an expanded understanding of what it means to learn, grow, and achieve—in effect, to improve.

Audience for the guide

This guide was conceived for use by district or school improvement teams focused on improving programs and services for English learner students. It is intended for any team of New Mexico educators, including NMPED staff, district administrators, site administrators, Title III subgrant recipients, teachers who have English learner students in their classrooms, and other district or school personnel who serve these students. Thus, the guide includes considerations for different team configurations (such as district-, site-, and teacher-led teams). The ideal team configuration would be at least one district leader, at least one site leader, and one or more classroom teachers, which would enable the team to both authorize and scale improvements across multiple schools in the district. A site-specific team, whether administrator- or teacher-led, is naturally more limited in its potential impact.

The process described herein may be used within the NM DASH planning process. It may also be used as a separate process independent of NM DASH. If it is used as a separate process, improvement teams will want to communicate and coordinate with their NM DASH school core team to ensure that the efforts of the two teams do not conflict and are not unnecessarily redundant.

Context for the guide's continuous improvement approach

This guide proposes a continuous improvement approach to addressing and correcting long-standing inequities in systems of schooling that have led to education disparities for English learner students. The overarching goal of a continuous improvement approach in education contexts is to improve outcomes for students by making enduring changes to a system (Bryk et al., 2015; Park et al., 2013). Processes and tools that support continuous improvement allow local systems, such as schools and districts, to learn about and develop solutions to problems that may be unique to their specific contexts.

In contrast with a one-size-fits-all improvement approach, continuous improvement prioritizes ongoing learning and reflection by teachers and leaders, and it values their knowledge and input. It also differs in that it embraces both broad stakeholder input and the use of small, rapid tests to determine efficacy before large-scale adoption and implementation of any change in practice. For example, in a one-size-fits-all approach, a district leader might decide to purchase and adopt a set of curricular materials from a state-approved list, then support broad implementation by offering teachers training on how to use the materials. In this example, the communication is one-way, from the district to the teachers, with the message being "We purchased these materials, and we expect you to implement them."

A district leader who, instead, takes a continuous improvement approach might first establish a team of teachers and site leaders to review the state list of materials and collectively decide on two or three sets they consider worth pilot testing. By then piloting the materials, the team can measure how well each set meets students' needs; determine the levels and types of support that teachers will need to successfully implement the materials; and/or consider how the materials might need to be adapted to be most effective for the district's unique context. The district can then take action based on better information and deeper understanding, with its decision informed by the committee of teachers and site leaders representing those who will ultimately need to use the materials.

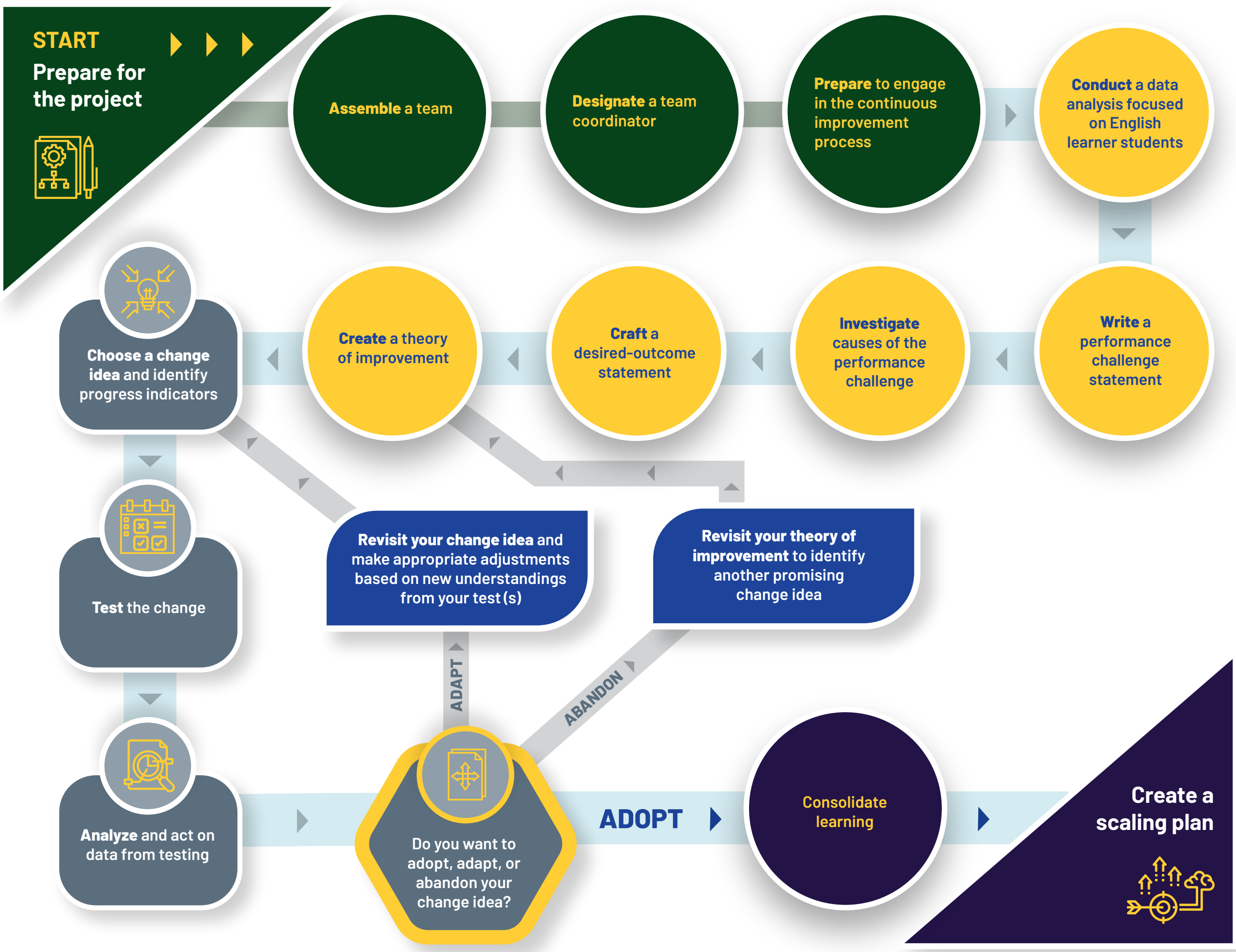
Understanding local context is essential in any improvement effort. This is especially true when implementing programs and services for English learner students, an inherently diverse group of individuals who come to school with rich and robust funds of knowledge and whose needs are as varied as their backgrounds, influenced by such factors as their home language proficiency, their histories of schooling, and their special needs or talents. Using a continuous improvement approach can support local systems in making changes that are appropriate for and relevant to particular student needs while also moving toward broader system change. The underlying principles of a continuous improvement approach in education, according to Yurkofsky et al. (2020), are:

1. Ground improvement efforts in local problems or needs.
2. Empower practitioners to take an active role in research and improvement.
3. Engage in iteration, which entails a cyclical process of action, assessment, reflection, and adjustment.
4. Strive to spur change across schools and systems, not just individual classrooms.

The approach described in this guide is based on these principles and informed by the work of key experts and leaders in the continuous improvement field (see, for example, Bryk, 2018; Park et al., 2013; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Guide development was influenced, in particular, by the improvement science methodology described in *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better* (Bryk et al., 2015) and the *NM DASH Process Guide for Schools* (NMPED, Priority Schools Bureau, 2021), which also promotes a continuous improvement approach. The tools and processes within this guide are intended to complement the NM DASH process. To create greater coherence between this guide and the *NM DASH Process Guide*, this guide uses NM DASH terminology whenever possible (for example, in the names of the steps in the continuous improvement approach, such as "performance challenge"; "desired-outcome statement").

Part 1: Process map and time commitments

Figure 2. Process map for engaging in continuous improvement



The processes and average times needed for engaging in all aspects of the continuous improvement approach described in this guide are shown in the process map. The duration of a full cycle of this approach might be substantially shorter or longer, depending on the degree to which an improvement team is able to postpone other commitments in order to free up concentrated time early in the process, or, conversely, the degree to which the team must extend the work over a prolonged period, due to other commitments. For example, a single cycle can be conducted in a couple of weeks if team members are meeting several times each week, but if teams cannot meet weekly or dedicate adequate time to required continuous improvement tasks in between meetings, the cycle could take longer. The durations described in table 1 (for example, 6–8 weeks) assume that a team can convene during most weeks for one 60–90-minute meeting.

Table 1. Processes and time commitments for engaging in the improvement approach

Process	Number and length of improvement team meetings	Planning time prior to each meeting (and tasks) *(These tasks are typically assigned to the team coordinator)*	Time for tasks following each meeting *(These tasks are typically assigned to some or all team members)*
Assemble a team and designate a team coordinator	0 or 1 (30 minutes)	60+ minutes (speaking to potential team members about their participation; creating an agenda)	Not applicable
Prepare to engage in the continuous improvement process	1 (60–90 minutes)	60+ minutes (ensuring alignment to school 90-day plan; assembling meeting materials; creating an agenda)	Not applicable

Process	Number and length of improvement team meetings	Planning time prior to each meeting (and tasks) *(These tasks are typically assigned to the team coordinator)*	Time for tasks following each meeting *(These tasks are typically assigned to some or all team members)*
Conduct a data analysis and write a performance challenge statement	1 or more (each 60–90 minutes)	Several hours (choosing a data analysis approach; coordinating the collection of data; analyzing data, compiling data packets; creating an agenda)	Several hours to gather additional data, if more data are needed
Investigate the causes of the performance challenge	1 or more (each 60–90 minutes)	30+ minutes (setting up a collaborative work space; creating an agenda)	Several hours to seek feedback on the fishbone diagram and learn more about the experiences of people in the system, such as students
Craft a desired-outcome statement	1 (30–60 minutes)	30 minutes or less (creating an agenda)	Not applicable
Develop a theory of improvement	1 (60–90 minutes)	30 minutes or less (creating an agenda)	60–90 minutes to seek feedback on the theory of improvement from other stakeholders in the system

Process	Number and length of improvement team meetings	Planning time prior to each meeting (and tasks) *(These tasks are typically assigned to the team coordinator)*	Time for tasks following each meeting *(These tasks are typically assigned to some or all team members)*
Choose a change idea to test; define progress indicators for the test	1 or more (30–60 minutes)	30 minutes or less (creating an agenda)	Not applicable
Plan to test the change idea; implement the test	1 or more (30–60 minutes)	30 minutes or less (creating an agenda)	60+ minutes over 1–3 weeks, depending on the change idea
Analyze and act on data from the change idea	1 (60–90 minutes)	30+ minutes (creating an agenda; assembling materials)	Not applicable
Consolidate learning from the change idea and decide on next steps*	1 (60–90 minutes)	30+ minutes (creating an agenda; assembling materials)	Dependent on what the consolidated learning shows

*The process does not end here, but continues, either returning to testing the same change idea, with some adaptations, or deciding on an alternative change idea. Depending on the complexity of the performance challenge, the same theory of change may be used to test changes for multiple semesters.

Part 2: The how-to of continuous improvement and helpful tools

2.1 Assemble a team

Once a district, a school, and/or teachers have committed to using *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* and the continuous improvement approach described in this guide to improve programs, services, and, ultimately, outcomes for their English learner students, they must assemble a team to plan, coordinate, and implement the effort. The type of team that is needed will depend on whether the focus of continuous improvement for English learner programs and services will be districtwide, schoolwide, or contained in a few classrooms.

The recommended approach is to create a district-led team, because doing so allows for more-systemic change across schools. With that said, it is possible—and sometimes necessary, due to available time, scheduling, or other types of constraints—for a school-site or teacher-led team to engage in improvement work.

However broad (such as districtwide) or narrow (such as a high school content area) the focus of an improvement effort might be, building a representative team is valuable because multiple perspectives are needed. Those perspectives are important, first in helping the team "see the whole system" and then in analyzing the results of any changes and making subsequent decisions about next steps. In addition, having diverse stakeholders work together democratizes the process and facilitates input from and communication out to the broader community, whether the improvement team is at the district level, at the school level, or within a segment of a school (for example, one subject-matter department within a large secondary school; one grade within an elementary school). All of those reasons for broad representation notwithstanding, it is also important that the team be kept small enough (in the range of five to seven people) to be nimble in its decision-making.

A **district-led team** might include a director of curriculum and instruction, an English language development coordinator, a school administrator, a teacher, and a parent and/or a student. This type of team might initially include representation from just one school or from more than one school. If the tested changes in practice are successful, the district might add members to the original team to begin to scale the changes across more schools, or might assemble additional teams to help in that scaling effort. For example, if a change in practice is successful at elementary schools and the district wants to scale the change to middle and high schools, district leadership might choose to create a middle school improvement team and a high school improvement team to test the change in those schools.

A **site-led team** might include an English language development coach, a school administrator, one or more teachers, and a parent and/or a student. If the changes in practice are successful, the team may add members to begin to scale the changes across more classrooms.

Considerations

- Does your improvement team have diverse stakeholder representation, including district leaders, teachers, and parents and/or students?
- Does your team include at least one person, or have access to one person, with experience or expertise in using culturally and linguistically sustaining approaches to serve English learner students, such as an English language development specialist?
- Is your team as a whole well versed in culturally responsive education, social justice, and equity? If not, take some time to review *NMPED's Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Guidance Handbook* (NMPED, Language and Culture Division, 2020) before starting your improvement effort.

A note on "Considerations"

Those that are specifically geared toward district- or site-led teams are noted with this icon.

Those that are specifically geared toward teacher-led teams are noted with this icon.

Those that are appropriate for any team type do not have an accompanying icon.

A **teacher-led team** might include grade-level or subject-area teachers, a classroom aide, and a parent and/or a student. This team might also seek support from colleagues, such as a site administrator or someone with experience in how to represent and interpret data.

Regardless of team type, it is important that the team include (or have access to consult with) colleagues or support providers who have expertise in supporting English learner students through the use of culturally and linguistically sustaining approaches that prioritize social justice and equity.

Considerations

- Does improvement team membership overlap with that of the NM DASH school core team? If not, was this decision made deliberately? If possible, the teams should have some level of overlap, to ensure coherence. At the very least, the team should communicate regularly with the NM DASH school core team.

- Do you have the resources you need in order to engage in this project? How might you involve your leadership to support the team, as necessary (for example, by protecting or creating time for collaboration)?

2.2 Designate a team coordinator

The team coordinator is a member of the team who, in addition to participating in all team discussions and activities, has the additional responsibilities of organizing and coordinating the work of the team. These responsibilities include, for example, scheduling and facilitating meetings, creating agendas, and maintaining shared documents (such as the fishbone diagram) in an accessible location. The coordinator may be designated by whoever initially establishes the team or by the team itself. In some instances, a team may choose to not have a permanent coordinator designated, opting instead to rotate the responsibilities over the course of the improvement effort.

In any case, a designated coordinator should generally not be the person with the most positional authority on the team (for example, not an associate superintendent on a district-led team, and not the principal on a site-led team). Instead, it should be someone who has more time to commit to the effort. On a district- or site-led team, the person with the most positional authority plays the important role of authorizing and supporting the work, while the team coordinator takes the critical responsibility for keeping the work moving.

With some exceptions, which are clearly indicated as being for the team, the guidance that follows is directed to the coordinator, primarily because it entails work related to organizing, coordinating, or facilitating. With that said, once a team is assembled, with or without someone designated for the coordinator role, responsibility for the continuous improvement process is assumed collectively by all team members.

2.3 Prepare to engage in the continuous improvement process

Associated NM DASH component

Component 1: Build School Core Team

Component 2: Set Student Achievement Goals

Description and purpose

Preparing to effectively implement a change in practice from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* requires the team both to learn more about the contents of that document and to center English learner students as part of the NM DASH plan of the participating school(s).

Helpful hint

- Understanding the varied needs of your English learner students is essential to achieving equitable outcomes within the classroom, school, or district.

Staying focused on English learner students

- Value and affirm the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of your English learner students, build on their strengths, and consider their social, emotional, and academic needs when you plan your classroom, school, or district priorities. Remember that this student group was one of the groups named in the *Yazzie/Martinez* lawsuit as not having had their education needs met well enough to prepare them for college and careers.
- Remember that, by law, English learner students are entitled to quality programs and services that support them in meeting the rigorous demands of college and careers

Steps in preparing to engage in the continuous improvement process

Team: Aligning team efforts with the NM DASH process to extent possible

1. How you align efforts with the NM DASH process depends on team type.
   a. District-led team: Have each participant school engage in the planning process outlined in NM DASH Components 1 and 2, including crafting a student achievement goal that centers English learner students.
   b. Site-led team: Engage in the planning process outlined in NM DASH Components 1 and 2, including crafting a student achievement goal that centers English learner students.
   c. Teacher-led team: If your school has a student achievement goal that centers English learner students, align your efforts with that goal. If your school has not established an achievement goal for English learner students, your data analysis process will drive your focus.
2. Create an agenda for the kickoff meeting.

Meeting to kick off continuous improvement effort (60–90 minutes)

1. If a team coordinator has not already been designated, collectively establish team roles and responsibilities.
   a. Decide who will schedule meetings, create agendas, facilitate meetings, and keep track of next steps and between-meeting tasks. As noted in step 2.2, this work is typically done by a team coordinator, but a team may wish to distribute responsibilities. Decide whether these roles and responsibilities will be static (such as the same person being responsible for creating the agenda for each meeting) or dynamic (such as roles and responsibilities shifting over the course of the improvement effort). If they will be dynamic, decide on the process by which the team will ensure that all roles and responsibilities are assigned and carried out for each meeting.
2. As a team, become familiar with *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*.
   a. Read about the list's purpose and layout (pages 8 through 11 of *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*).
   b. Choose one of the list's four focus areas into which the team will take an illustrative deeper dive: equity, access, and engagement; instructional programs; instructional practices; or evaluating progress.

c. For your chosen focus area:

i. Read the description of that focus area.

ii. Begin examining the suggested teacher and leader promising practices for that area.

iii. Choose and examine a resource associated with the suggested teacher or leader practices.

- Example: For the third focus area, instructional practices, read the description on page 18 of *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*. Then, read the practices in the section "Using instructional practices to support student learning & collaboration" beginning on page 19. Locate the teacher practice *"Provide explicit instruction on reading comprehension strategies, discussion and writing skills, and vocabulary knowledge"* on page 20 and click on the hyperlink, which will bring you to a table on page 53. This table shows several associated resources to help frame what this practice might look like in the classroom. Look at the resource *10 Key Policies and Practices for Teaching English Language Learners With Strong Evidence of Effectiveness from High-Quality Research*, focusing on those policies and practices that may help with implementation of the teacher practice.

2.4 Conduct data analysis focused on English learner students

Associated NM DASH component

Component 3: Conduct Data Analysis and Identify THE Performance Challenge

Supplemental Module 1: Focusing on Student Groups Module

Description and purpose

Conducting an initial data analysis allows the team to ground itself in data and ensures that the focus of your project is based on the needs of your students and local context.

Helpful hints

- As you analyze the data, be aware of and try to put aside your preconceived ideas.
- Take an "asset-based" approach to understanding the data. This means seeing English learner students as multilinguists who are learning another language and who come to schools with valuable funds of knowledge.
- Use qualitative and quantitative data sources that are relevant to English learner student outcomes, such as observations and artifacts of student work, classroom behaviors, academic performance, English language proficiency, reclassification status, attendance, and mobility.
- Use Tool 1, Protocol for examining data provided on page 30 of this guide, or another protocol of your choice.
- If possible, bring an English language development specialist into your data analysis of language proficiency, and/or check your inferences with an English language development specialist.

2.5 Staying focused on English learner students

- Take an assets-based perspective—for example, seeing the English learner student first as multilingual and second as someone needing to learn English.
- Consider using multiple types of data, including:
  - Observational data (for example, from teachers observing students' skills).[5]
  - Student perspectives (for example, from student surveys, interviews,[6] observations, or student focus groups).
  - Family perspectives (for example, from surveys, intake forms, focus groups, or interviews).
  - ACCESS for ELLs (ACCESS) scores, student rosters, and individual student reports as appropriate, by domain and composite scores (or, for students who are dually identified as English learner students and students with disabilities, Alternate ACCESS scores).
  - Overall English proficiency level data from year to year.
  - Reclassification data.
  - English learner student performance on summative English language arts (ELA) and math assessments.
  - Performance on formative or interim assessments (NMPED, 2021).

[5] Teacher observations of students can be a useful and informal method of gathering information on students.

[6] Empathy interviews are a type of interview frequently used in continuous improvement efforts to better understand a problem from the perspective of those who experience the problem firsthand. This method ensures that solutions to improvement challenges are reflective of the needs of students, families, and communities. (See "**Empathy Interviews**" by Nelsestuen & Smith [2020] for more explanation and a guide to conducting empathy interviews.)

Steps in conducting data analysis

Preparing for meeting (several hours over 1–2 weeks)

1. Review Tool 1, Protocol for examining data (page 30).

2. Choose a data analysis approach, conferring with other team members as needed in making this decision. Consider consulting with the NM DASH school core team to identify opportunities for collaboration or information sharing.

   a. Recommended: Use the protocol for examining data (or another protocol of your own choosing) to conduct two data analyses. The first analysis should focus on large-scale summative data, such as scores from ACCESS for ELLs (ACCESS) or state assessment data. (For students who are dually identified as English learner students and students with disabilities, use Alternate ACCESS scores.) Results from the first analysis of summative data can help guide identification of the data sources that the team wants to use for the second analysis, which should be of local data, such as formative classroom data, student or family surveys, or progress monitoring data. For example, if the summative data analysis shows that writing is a performance challenge, the local data analysis can focus on student writing.

Considerations

- DST What data will help you round out your understanding of the needs of English learner students in your context?
- DST To gain a more complete picture of your English learner students and their current context, consider analyzing some qualitative data, such as samples of student work or teachers' observations of students' skills. Think about which content or skill domains you want to explore (for example, reading, writing, speaking, listening, mathematics).
- TT What data are available to you? Is there someone on campus who can support you in accessing or collecting the data you need?
- TT What qualitative sources of student data might you use (for example, student writing samples)?

b. Alternative: If the team has more time to dedicate to the project, consider conducting additional analyses, of other types of available English learner student data (for example, teacher observations, ACCESS domain scores, years in program, areas of growth, reclassification data).

c. Alternative: If there is only enough time to conduct one analysis, choose whether to analyze large-scale summative data or local data. If the team analyzes only one data set, its understanding of the needs of English learner students is likely to be more limited than if it analyzes more data sets.

3. Gather the necessary data, ensuring that everyone on the team can view and/or examine the data during the upcoming data-analysis meeting.
4. Schedule and create an agenda for the meeting.

Meeting to analyze data (60–90 minutes each)

1. Use the protocol to help the team engage in data analysis during each meeting.
2. At the end of the final data analysis meeting, proceed to step 2.5, in which the team writes a performance challenge statement based on findings from the analyses.

Tool 1. Protocol for examining data

Purpose

This protocol is intended to guide an improvement team in using data analysis to identify performance strengths and challenges for a school's or district's English learner students.

Roles

- Facilitator. (Ideally, this is someone who understands the data being presented. If the facilitator does not have knowledge of how to interpret score reports and prepare other data for analysis, it is recommended that the facilitator consult with a school data specialist or an English language development specialist prior to the meeting, to gain greater understanding of the data.)
- Notetaker.
- Timekeeper.

Materials

Relevant data, such as:

- ACCESS reports (consider using multiple report types to better understand the data).
- English learner student reclassification data.
- Classroom observation data (for example, teachers' observations of students' performance; student-focused classroom data).
- Student work.
- English learner student performance on summative assessments, compared to the performance of non-English learner students.
- Local progress-monitoring, formative assessment, or benchmark data.

Note: If the team tries to look deeply at all available data, the process can quickly become overwhelming. Consider conducting one analysis of high-level summative data and using results from that analysis to help determine questions that can be addressed through subsequent collection and analysis of local and/or classroom data.

Preparing

The facilitator prepares data packets for each team member prior to the data-analysis meeting. A data packet should contain all of the data that team members will be analyzing. For example, if the team is interpreting ACCESS reports, a copy of the report(s) should be given to each member.[7] If the team is analyzing local progress monitoring or classroom observation data, the facilitator should present the data in such a way that it is easy to read and interpret (such as by creating a sortable spreadsheet that includes student writing scores on various indicators on a rubric, so that the data can be sorted and interpreted in various ways, or by making relevant and user-friendly data charts and graphs).

Getting started: Overview of data (10 minutes)

The facilitator explains the protocol, walking the group through each of the following steps (the first four steps take the form of questions) and explaining how long each step should take. All team members should have the protocol in front of them so that they can follow along. The facilitator gives a brief description of the particular data to be discussed, along with any explanations as to how to read score reports or other preparations of data, and answers clarifying questions as necessary. The facilitator then asks the participants to spend a few minutes familiarizing themselves with the data.

Steps for analysis (up to 50 minutes for all four steps)

1. What parts of these data draw your attention? Just consider the facts. For now, resist any temptation to interpret why something is happening. (10–20 minutes overall)
    a. Team members review data and write individual observations of what parts of the data catch their attention (5–10 minutes). They share observations and discuss as a group (5–10 minutes).
2. What questions can we ask of the data we have? What do the data tell us? What do the data not tell us? What questions require additional data? (10 minutes overall)
    a. The facilitator encourages team members to make inferences about the data and to support their statements with evidence from the data. Team members write their own notes in response to questions (3 minutes). They share notes and discuss as a group (7 minutes).

[7] Team members who are not accustomed to analyzing ACCESS reports should refer to the *ACCESS for ELLs Interpretive Guide for Score Reports* (WIDA, 2021a) and the *Alternate ACCESS for ELLs Interpretive Guide for Score Reports* (WIDA, 2021b) for guidance.

3. What performance strengths do the data reveal? (10 minutes overall) The facilitator asks team members to look for indications of success in the data. Team members write their own notes in response to questions (3 minutes). They share notes and discuss as a group (7 minutes).

4. What performance challenges do the data reveal? Is one challenge more urgent than others? (10 minutes overall) Team members write their ideas about the performance challenges (3 minutes). They share ideas and discuss as a group (7 minutes). If needed, the facilitator helps the group narrow the number and/or focus of the performance challenges to a single performance challenge. Doing so will help the team focus its improvement efforts more narrowly. If a performance challenge is identified very generally, such as "reading," it may be useful to revisit the data to see if the data point to a more specific challenge, such as "reading informational texts" or "answering interpretive questions from texts."

Following the team's final data analysis, the facilitator has team members collectively write a performance challenge statement, as described in step 2.5. Writing the performance challenge statement can occur either at the end of the final data analysis meeting or in a subsequent meeting.

2.6 Write a performance challenge statement

Associated NM DASH component

Component 3: Conduct Data Analysis and Identify THE Performance Challenge

Description and purpose

Identifying a performance challenge is articulating any outcome gaps that you would like to eliminate or performance you would like to improve.

Helpful hints

- Establish a performance challenge that members of the improvement team can directly influence (in other words, that is within their control) and that is feasible to address.
- Avoid attributing blame or identifying a solution in a performance challenge statement.
- Frame the performance challenge statement factually, and avoid using deficit language.

Staying focused on English learner students

- The performance challenge statement should directly relate to English learner students.

2.7 Step in writing a performance challenge statement

NOTE: This step may be taken at the end of the final data analysis meeting or or in a subsequent meeting.

Team: Drafting—and redrafting—performance challenge statement (15–30 minutes)

1. Following the final data analysis, collectively write a performance challenge statement that reflects your findings from all analyses. The following examples (table 2) of draft statements, improvement suggestions, and final versions can help the team calibrate and complete the performance challenge statement.

Table 2. Performance challenge statement examples (initial drafts and revisions)

Draft statement	How can it be improved?	Improved statement
English learner students are not reading as well as non–English learner students.	• Cite data, such as the percentage of students. • Be more specific about what "not reading well" means. • Consider focusing on English learner students at a particular language fluency level.	Among our English learner students in the 3–5 grade span who score at the "Developing" level or above on ACCESS for ELLs at our school, 70 percent score below the "Proficient" level in reading informational text on our statewide assessment.
Graduation rates of English learner students across the entire state are too low.	• Make the challenge specific to your district, school, or classrooms. • Ensure that the challenge is within your locus of control. • Cite data in the performance challenge statement.	In our district, the graduation rate of entering seniors who are English learner students is 50 percent, compared to the graduation rate of 90 percent of non–English learner students.
When writing independently, our English learner students need writing frames that have more structure.	• Cite data, such as the percentage of students. • Avoid identifying a solution (for example, "Our students need writing frames that have more structure"). • Be more specific about which aspects or type of writing.	At Arroyo Elementary, 90 percent of grades 4 and 5 English learner students score below the "Proficient" level on our district writing rubric for writing opinions.

Draft statement	How can it be improved?	Improved statement
Our English learner students feel nervous speaking during class time because they are afraid they will be teased for not speaking well enough in English.	• Cite data, such as the percentage of students. • Avoid identifying a specific cause (for example, "Our English learner students feel nervous because . . .").	Among grade 7 English learner students at Piñon Middle School, 70 percent score at the "Developing" level or below for speaking on the ACCESS English Language Proficiency Test.

2.8 Investigate causes of the performance challenge

Associated NM DASH component

Component 4: Conduct Root Cause Analysis and Select Focus Areas

Description and purpose

Improvement work follows the idea that every system is designed to get the results it gets. Investigating causes of the performance challenge by examining how the education system plays out for English learner students in your classroom, school, or district can reveal why the system results in certain outcomes. Each person on the team, regardless of position, sees only a portion of how the classroom or school system functions. So, to gain a more complete understanding of how the system is and is not working well for English learner students, the team needs the perspectives of all team members and, likely, of others outside the team. Only with deeper understanding can the team plan improvement efforts that have the potential to be effective.

Helpful hints

- Engage stakeholders who are close to the performance challenge (such as teachers, students, or parents), to understand their experiences. If you have done this when building your team, great! If not, for this part in the continuous improvement process, seeking input from diverse stakeholders is especially important, to ensure that your understanding of the causes of the performance challenge is as complete as possible.
- Keep an open, curious mind. Recognize that each person, including yourself, has only a limited understanding of and perspective on the system.
- Avoid attributing blame to individuals or groups. Instead, focus on the ways in which systems reflect collective mindsets and biases.

Staying focused on English learner students

- Examine causes of performance challenges through the eyes of English learner students and their families. For example, speak with students, in age-appropriate ways, about their experiences related to a performance challenge. Consider interviewing a small number of students and/or parents, or hosting small, informal meetings and inviting them to speak.
- Learn about transformative family engagement[8] (for example, being inclusive of diverse perspectives, and individualizing outreach and support).

[8] For more information about transformative family engagement, see the National PTA's Center for Family Engagement webpage **Four Parts of Family Engagement** (National PTA, n.d.).

Steps in investigating causes of the performance challenge

Preparing for meeting (60 minutes or less)

1. Set up a collaborative working environment that encourages and enables all team members to share ideas during and between meetings. If someone will be taking notes during a meeting, try to ensure that the notes are visible to all team members. For in-person meetings, use a Mondopad, whiteboard, poster paper, or something similar. If meeting virtually, use an online collaboration tool such as Google Docs, the Zoom whiteboard function, or Jamboard.
2. Schedule and create an agenda for each upcoming meeting. Develop norms for the meetings and share them at the beginning of each meeting. Examples of meeting norms include:
   a. Keep an open mind.
   b. Maintain a growth mindset in relation to fellow team members and to students and their families.
   c. Assume positive intentions and take responsibility for impact.
   d. Start and end on time.
   e. Be present.
   f. Stick to agreed-upon norms and listen to all voices.
3. Write down the performance challenge statement and post the statement where all team members can see it during the meeting.

Meeting to investigate causes of the performance challenge (60–90 minutes each)

1. Give team members 2–5 minutes to individually brainstorm and write down what they believe to be causes of the performance challenge. It is important that ideas not be limited at this point. In the next step, the team will need to organize the proposed causes by placing them in defined categories. For in-person meetings, each proposed cause should be written on its own piece of paper, such as a sticky note. If meeting virtually or working electronically, team members can list their brainstormed causes in a shared electronic workspace, such as a Google Doc.
2. Have team members place their brainstormed causes where all other team members can see them (for example, on a whiteboard or chart paper if in person, or in a list in a Google Doc if meeting virtually). Have them begin, collectively, to categorize the causes. There is no one right way to do so. They should name the categories but avoid spending too much time trying to find the perfect name.

3. After causes have been categorized, complete the fishbone diagram. Write the performance challenge in the "head" of the fish; then, place the categories and causes on the diagram, using the template on page 39. (See pages 67 and 80 for examples of completed portions of a fishbone diagram.) The categories are the large "bones" of the fish, while the causes are the small "bones" under each category.
4. Once the team has completed the fishbone diagram, have team members review the proposed categories and causes to determine which potentially relate to the experiences of people who are not represented on the team. For example, if an identified cause is that students are not engaged in lessons and if the team has no student member, that particular cause relates to a group that is not represented. Use these determinations to inform the post-meeting action steps described in the following section.
5. Review the post-meeting actions with the team.

Considerations

- As the coordinator, remain cognizant of and sensitive to the power dynamics that may be at play among team members during this process.
- As the coordinator, remind members to keep an open, curious mind during this process. Doing so allows development of a more complete understanding of the causes of, and potential solutions for, the performance challenge. Those who come to the table believing they already know the cause of the performance challenge or how to address it are less likely to develop such an understanding.

Team: Continuing to investigate, post-meeting (likely several hours over 1–2 weeks)

1. As individual team members, seek feedback and input from other people in the system who are close to the challenge, including those who are most affected by it. (Coordinate with fellow team members to ensure that you are seeking input from different people.) For example, share the fishbone diagram draft with other teachers in your school and with parents on an existing advisory committee (such as an English learner parent advisory committee), and ask for feedback on its completeness and accuracy.
2. Speak with stakeholders who are not on the team, such as students, teachers, or parents, to better understand their experiences. For example, if a concept such as "student engagement" or "student motivation" was identified as a cause of a performance challenge and is recorded in your fishbone diagram, interview a few students to learn about any of their experiences that are relevant to the concept and/or the performance challenge and how they would describe the concept and the challenge.
3. At the next team meeting after this additional investigation, update the fishbone diagram.

Considerations

- Have you engaged teachers (beyond those on the team) in the investigation of causes?
- Have you engaged students and families (beyond those on the team) in the investigation of causes?

Tool 2. Fishbone diagram template

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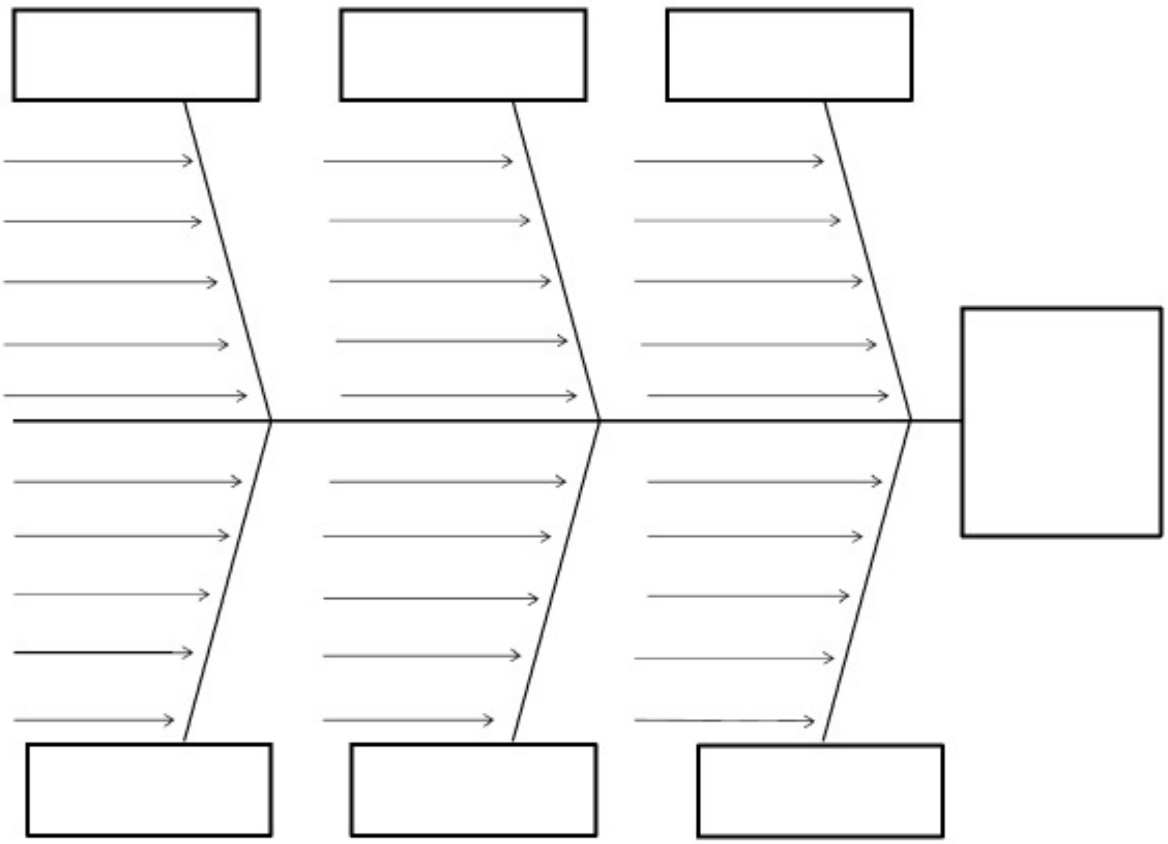
Fishbone Diagram Worksheet

In the diagram below, enter a key challenge in the "head" of the fishbone. For each "bone" of the diagram, identify and record a contributing cause. Each cause should directly relate to the key challenge and be supported by evidence.



2.9 Craft a desired-outcome statement

Associated NM DASH component

Component 5: Create Desired Outcomes, Develop Progress Indicators, and Define Critical Actions[9]

Description and purpose

A short desired-outcome statement, which articulates a specific goal for improvement efforts, serves as a simple tool to help focus an improvement effort. Specifically, it helps a team transition from defining the performance challenge to addressing the challenge.

Helpful hints

- Do not include or imply a solution.
- A desired outcome is a SMART goal—that is, specific, measurable, achievable, results-driven, and time-bound.
- Include:
  - What?
  - For whom?
  - By how much?
  - By when?

Example: We will increase the percentage of grades 4 and 5 English learner students who are scoring at "Proficient" and above on the district writing rubric for opinion writing from 10 percent to 25 percent by June 2022.

Staying focused on English learner students

- Your desired-outcome statement should identify English learner students as the focal student group for your goal.
- Focus on one indicator for English learner students (for example, English proficiency levels; reclassification rates; or performance outcomes on assignments or assessments).

[9] This step is associated with the first portion of NM DASH Component 5 (Create Desired Outcomes).

Steps in crafting a desired-outcome statement

Preparing for meeting (30 or fewer minutes)

1. Schedule and prepare an agenda for the upcoming meeting.
2. On the day of the meeting, prepare the meeting space (in-person or virtual) by writing the following questions where the team will be able to see them:
    a. What is the performance challenge that needs to be addressed?
    b. What are we trying to achieve?

Meeting to craft a desired-outcome statement (30–60 minutes)

Have the team:

1. Describe in two to three sentences what the team hopes to improve.
2. Explain the rationale for choosing that improvement focus. If possible, include baseline data and other benchmarks.
3. Identify the primary group that will benefit from the proposed improvement (for example, grades 4 and 5 English learner students), and explain how you expect them to benefit.
4. Identify whether and how the improvement will benefit others as well.
5. Define expected outcomes and benefits.
6. Collectively write a desired-outcome statement, using the following template (tool 3) or another format.

Tool 3. Desired-outcome statement template

We will: ☐ improve ☐ increase ☐ decrease

The: ☐ percentage of ☐ number/amount of ______________________________
(student group)

Who are: ______________________________
(indicator)

From: ______________________________
(baseline percentage / number)

To: ______________________________
(describe the change in percentage / number)

By: ______________________________
(specific date)

The following examples (table 3), showing draft statements, improvement suggestions, and final statements, can help the team to calibrate and complete its own desired-outcome statement.

Table 3. Desired-outcome statement examples (initial drafts and revisions)

Draft statement	How can it be improved?	Revised statement
By the end of next year, our district will increase English reading performance levels by 10 percent.	• Make the timeframe specific by naming a month and year. • Name the student group. • Describe the baseline reading proficiency level. • Describe the desired increase.	By May 2022, our district will increase the proportion of English learner students scoring above the “Proficient” level in reading informational text on our district benchmark exams from 30 percent to 40 percent.
Over the next two years, we will increase graduation rates for English learner students by 50 students.	• Make the timeframe specific by naming a month and year. • Describe the baseline graduation level as a percentage or decimal. • Describe the desired increase.	We will increase graduation rates for English learner students from 50 percent to 60 percent by June 2022.

Draft statement	How can it be improved?	Revised statement
We will increase the writing skills of our grades 4 and 5 English learner students.	• Be specific about what the increase will measure. • Make the timeframe specific by naming a month and year. • Describe the baseline profi- ciency level of the students as a percentage or decimal. • Describe the desired increase	• We will increase the percentage of grades 4 and 5 English learner students who are scoring at “Proficient” and above on the district writing rubric for opinion writing from 10 percent to 20 percent by June 2022.
We will increase the level of academic English spoken in classrooms by English learner students by a significant amount this school year.	• Be specific about what the increase will measure. • Make the timeframe specific by naming a month and year. • Describe the baseline profi- ciency level of the students as a percentage or decimal. • Describe the desired increase.	We will increase the percent- age of English learner students who are scoring a bove the “Developing” level for speaking on the ACCESS English Language Proficiency Test from 30 percent to 40 percent by June 2022.

2.10 Develop a theory of improvement

Associated NM DASH component

Component 5: Create Desired Outcomes, Develop Progress Indicators, and Define Critical Actions[10]

Description and purpose

A theory of improvement defines why and how you believe a particular change in practice (called a "change idea" in a theory of improvement) will logically lead to the desired outcome ("if we do X, we believe it will lead toward our desired outcome because . . ."). Defining a theory of improvement helps to focus efforts and to make explicit what needs to be done in order to reach a desired outcome.

Helpful hints

- A change idea is a specific modification, adjustment, or correction to how work is currently done regarding a particular aspect of or process within the district, school, or classroom.
- A proposed change idea should, in the initial testing phases, be small, easy to implement, and easy to test. Equally important, it should be a type of change that, if it fails, will not disadvantage students or have a large impact on the school or the district.

Staying focused on English learner students

- Consider and identify change ideas that meet the individual needs of all of your culturally and linguistically diverse English learner students, including, for example, those who have special needs, who are gifted, or who have recently arrived in the country and may have had little previous exposure to English or little formal education.
- Consider potential unintended negative consequences of any proposed change in practice for even one English learner student. Do your best to anticipate and then mitigate such unintended outcomes. Keep in mind that making no change could have negative impacts on students.

[10] This step is associated with the third portion of NM DASH Component 5 (Define Critical Actions). In the process described in this guide, the change ideas are a close approximation of the critical actions.

Steps in creating a theory of improvement

Once a desired-outcome statement has been crafted, a team is ready to start creating a theory of improvement.

Preparing for meeting (30 or fewer minutes)

1. Schedule and prepare an agenda for the upcoming meeting.

Meeting to develop a theory of improvement (60–90 minutes)

1. Have the team identify which areas of focus from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* are most closely related to the team's desired outcome and to the causes of the performance challenge that has been identified in the fishbone diagram. The areas of focus from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* are equity, access, and engagement; instructional programs; instructional practices; and evaluating progress. Identifying more than one area of focus is helpful because practices aligned to multiple areas work synergistically together to create learning opportunities for students.
2. Once the team has identified one or more areas of focus, have team members begin to examine the suggested practices within *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* to identify those that will help accomplish the desired outcome. Identify between two and six suggested practices. Identifying multiple suggested practices will support the team later, when revisiting the theory of improvement after testing change ideas. The suggested practices themselves are written in a broad way in *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*, so that they can be implemented in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes. Their broad nature necessitates that the team identify change ideas that are more specific and more finely grained than the suggested practices themselves. See table 4 for examples of suggested practices from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* and aligned change ideas.
3. After the team has identified one or more suggested practices, ask team members, collectively, "What are some change ideas that align to the suggested practices you have identified?" (The resources in *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* that are aligned with your identified practices can help in identifying change ideas, as well as in better understanding how to implement a change idea.) Change ideas should focus on behavioral changes that adults can make to increase access, opportunity, and support for English learner students. Examples of suggested practices from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* and aligned change ideas are provided in table 4.

4. Capture the areas of focus, suggested practices, change ideas, and desired outcome in the theory of improvement template. This step is particularly important because the team will refer to your theory of improvement multiple times throughout the improvement process. For examples of completed theories of improvement, see pages 70 and 83.

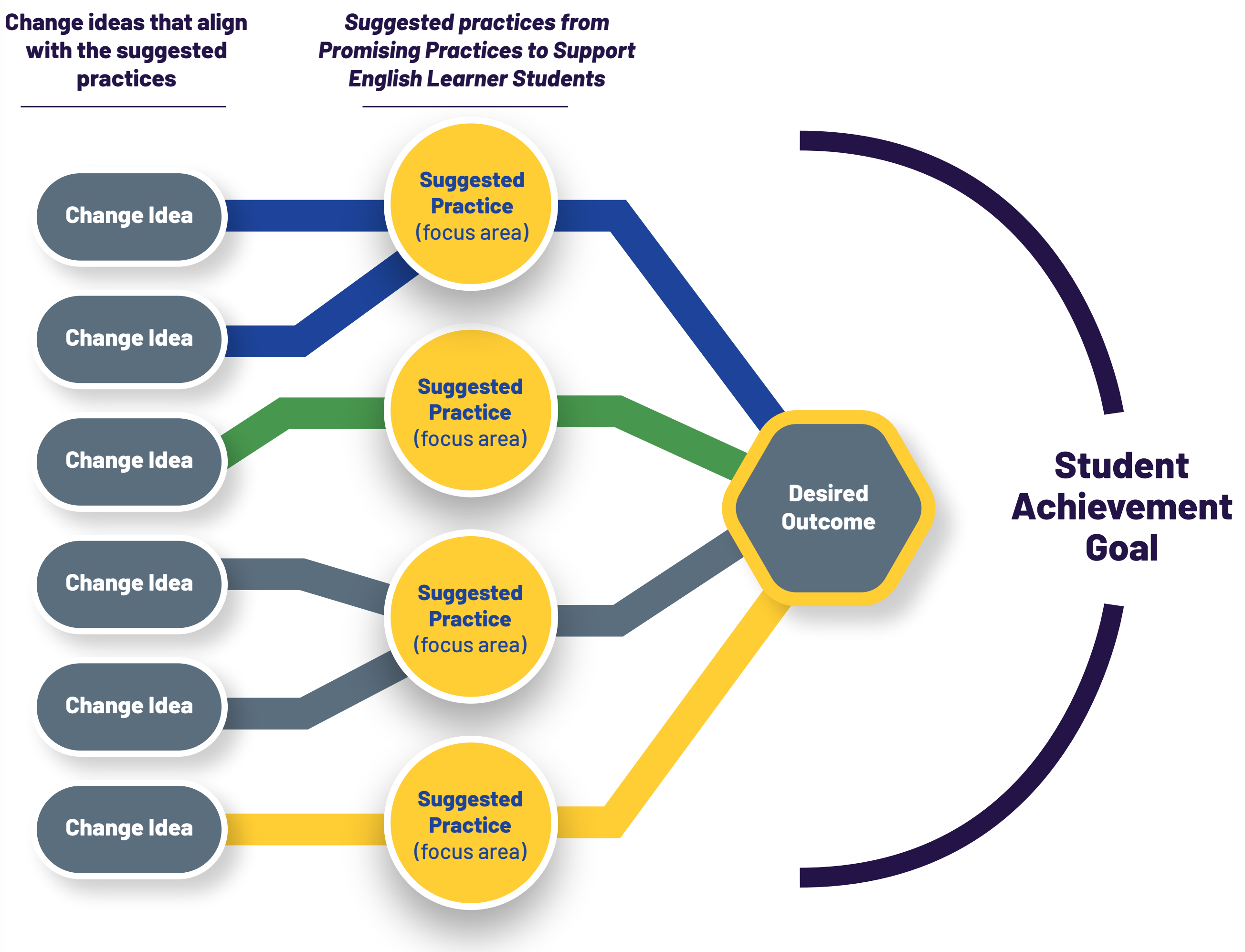
Considerations

- Have you received input that represents the diverse perspectives of your stakeholders?
- Where do you see potential gaps in your theory of improvement? Is it essential to address these gaps now?
- Does the theory of improvement reflect change ideas that are within your locus of control to try and to test?
- Will there be shared responsibility and/or support for testing the change ideas?

Table 4. Examples of change ideas aligned to suggested practices

Suggested practice (from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students)*	Change idea examples
Prioritize culturally relevant topics and materials, and encourage students to use their cultural and linguistic assets in learning tasks.	• Validate and affirm differences in culture, language, values, beliefs, practices, and traditions, and develop students' respect, empathy, and understanding of their own and others' cultures through Socratic discussions on culturally relevant texts. • Encourage students to discuss tasks, reading questions, and processes in their home language before using English. • Choose literature circle books that authentically reflect the cultures and lived experiences of our students. • Survey students on their interests and lived experiences and ensure that those interests and experiences are reflected in the choice of writing prompts.
Learn the components of instructional materials in order to understand their strengths and weaknesses.	• Analyze a chapter in our adopted textbook and consider it in light of the WIDA ELD Standards to see where there are strengths and gaps. Then, implement a textbook lesson that includes additional exercises to fill the gaps.
Provide students with specific and timely feedback on their learning that is relevant to learning goals and student needs.	• Hold writing conferences with students as they write research reports, providing specific feedback on the language resources of focus. • Communicate clear success criteria to students and ask them to evaluate their understanding against those criteria.

Tool 4. Theory of improvement template



2.11 Choose a change idea and define progress indicators

Associated NM DASH component

Component 5: Create Desired Outcomes, Develop Progress Indicators, and Define Critical Actions[11]

Description and purpose

Now that you have developed a theory of improvement and identified multiple proposed change ideas that may help you reach the desired outcome, you are ready to select and test one specific change idea. Choose one that makes sense, based on your theory of improvement, and that will be relatively easy to try. You will also need to identify a set of progress indicators that will allow you to measure the degree to which the change is or is not resulting in improvement.

Helpful hints

- The change you select should be agreed on with whoever will test and measure the change (usually one or more teachers).
- Keep it simple. Identifying a simple change that you can easily implement, along with simple progress indicators for which you can easily collect data, is much better than trying something more complicated to implement.

Staying focused on English learner students

- The selected change idea should clearly align to the needs of English learner students.
- The selected change idea should be aligned to suggested practices from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students.*

[11] This step is associated with the second and third portions of NM DASH Component 5 (Develop Progress Indicators and Define Critical Actions). In the process described in this guide, the change ideas are a close proximation of the critical actions, and progress indicators are defined for each tested change idea.

Steps in choosing a change idea and defining progress indicators

Preparing for meeting (30 or fewer minutes)

1. Schedule and prepare an agenda for the upcoming meeting.

Meeting to choose a change idea and define progress indicators (60–90 minutes)

1. Have the team review the change idea options listed in its theory of improvement and decide which one to test. It is appropriate for multiple people to try to implement the same change in different contexts. For example, three or four teachers can try out the change in their own classrooms.
2. Before a final decision is made about what change to test, have the team think about the following questions and issues:
   a. Are we sure the change we plan to test represents a change from current practice?
   b. How easy will it be for testers to integrate the change and testing into their work? If the change idea will require large shifts in what testers are already doing, you might want to rethink the change idea.
   c. Can the change be easily tested and replicated in other contexts?
   d. Should student feedback be collected?
3. Have team members determine how they will know whether the change is resulting in an improvement. To know this, the team must identify progress indicators for the change. Indicators should be measurable, and collecting data for them should be relatively quick and easy. Examples of indicators aligned to change ideas are provided in table 5 on page 51.

Considerations

- Are there changes you could test at the administrative level to improve processes that affect English learner students?
- If your change idea requires you to access a classroom, is there a willing teacher with whom you can partner?

Table 5. Example of change idea and aligned progress indicators

Change idea	What do we want to measure?	What are the progress indicators and how do we measure them?
Scaffold writing through jointly constructing texts with students as part of the writing process. (This change idea aligns to a suggested practice from ***Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students:*** "Scaffold learning tasks based on student learning needs using a range of techniques.")	Degree to which this change results in more writing. Degree to which this change results in improved writing quality.	Quantity of writing, using a simple tracker to track number of words written and number of assignments completed. Quality of writing, using a simple rubric to assess writing products.

2.12 Test the change

Associated NM DASH component

Component 6: Implement Plan and Monitor Progress

Description and purpose

To test a change in practice, use Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles. These simple cycles help a team be disciplined in its approach to understanding the degree to which change results in the desired improvement.

Helpful hints

- Time spent planning the test, so that you can measure outcomes well, is worthwhile.
- Predicting outcomes, including how students may respond to the change, can be helpful in thinking through the possible pitfalls of a change idea.
- Be sure to collect data on the test at its start, and consider these data to be "baseline" data.
- Set up a simple spreadsheet for organizing the collected data. For example, this can be a spreadsheet with class rosters. If a change is being tested in more than one class, create tabs for each one.

Staying focused on English learner students

- Implement the change and run the PDSA cycle in a class that has English learner students.
- A test should be designed to help you understand how English learner students are responding to a change. When collecting and analyzing data, focus explicitly on these students.
- Elicit student feedback and insights as a way to measure the change idea.

Steps in testing the change

Preparing for meeting (30 or fewer minutes)

1. Schedule, prepare an agenda, and gather materials (including the Plan section of the PDSA form on page 58) for the upcoming meeting.

Meeting to plan how to test the change (60–90 minutes)

Plan

1. Have the team complete the Plan section of the PDSA form as thoroughly as possible. Be sure the team responds to each prompt.
    a. It is important that the individual(s) trying and testing the change agree to do so; avoid volunteering someone who might be reluctant to participate in the test. Typically, those testing the change are part of the improvement team making decisions about change ideas.
    b. Regarding the measurement question in the Plan section, the team can plan to collect quantitative data, such as how many students engaged in the activity (based on an observation rubric), how many students completed the activity, or scores on a rubric or test. It may also plan to collect qualitative data, such as observations of student engagement/participation or emotional response to the activity. The details matter, so be ready to collect raw data in a separate document from the completed Plan section of the PDSA form. Also be sure that all testers have a ready way to track and document their data so they can measure improvement.
    c. The last question in the Plan section of the form is especially important because it will help the team think through the test outcomes. Predictions can be fairly simple, such as predicting how many students will complete an assignment, or predicting the quality of work the students will produce.

Considerations

- Will multiple people test a single change in practice?
- Will different members of your team test different changes in practice?
- If you are testing a change in practice at one grade level, could a modified version of the change be tested at a different grade level, or across language proficiencies, to help you understand whether this change could be effective across grade levels?

PDSA form—Plan section

Before you try your change idea, plan:

Identify the change idea.	Which change idea will we test?
Plan to test the change idea.	Who will do the testing? With whom will it be tested? When? Where?
Identify the goal of this test.	What do we want to learn from the test?
Decide how we will know if the change leads to improvement.	What data will we collect and analyze? (Consider collecting quantitative and qualitative data.) Who is going to collect it? How?
What do you predict is going to happen?	How will it go? Who will participate enthusiastically? Who will not?”

Team: Test the change idea *(60+ minutes over a week or two, depending on the complexity of the change idea and your context)*

Do

1. In this segment of the PDSA cycle, the team begins carrying out the plan, starting with having testers implement the chosen change in practice.
2. Use a data-tracking document or tool to consolidate information on test outcomes. For example, if testers are tracking the number of times that students raise their hands, you can tally the indicator data that testers have collected and marked on individual class rosters, then transfer the data to a spreadsheet. You may also be using the spreadsheet to collect feedback on your change idea from individual students, as well as scores from relevant writing assignments. In this example, a spreadsheet is a way to organize your data collection so it is in one place when you are ready to analyze it.

2.13 Analyze and act on data from testing

Associated NM DASH component

Component 6: Implement Plan and Monitor Progress

Description and purpose

Analyzing the findings from a cycle of the PDSA process is necessary in order to understand the degree to which your change is resulting in an improvement, and then to identify next steps. After analyzing the findings, you will decide whether to adapt the change and test a modification to the original idea, adopt the change as you tested it, or abandon the change because it did not lead to an expected improvement.

Helpful hints

- The PDSA process is a way to quickly test a change idea, so you need not be concerned with setting up your process like you would a scientific experiment.
- In addition to the PDSA form, use a simple document to track and record your progress-indicator data (see "Helpful hints" in step 2.10. page 52).

Staying focused on English learner students

- Focus your analysis on how English learner students responded to your change in practice.
- Identify any unanticipated consequences of the change for your English learner students.
- The decisions you make in the Act segment of the PDSA form should continue to focus on broadening learning opportunities for English learner students.

Steps in analyzing and acting on data from testing

Preparing for meeting (30 or fewer minutes)

1. Schedule, prepare an agenda, and gather materials (including the PDSA form) for the upcoming meeting.

2. Invite all testers to attend the meeting and ask them to bring their data.

Meeting to analyze data on the change (60–90 minutes)

Now that the team has completed the Plan and Do parts of the PDSA cycle, it is ready to examine the data from the testing and decide on next steps. This meeting will encompass both the Study and Act segments of a cycle.

Study

In this segment of the PDSA cycle, have the team analyze the data collected during the test. Consolidating data in a shared space, such as a Google Sheet, will be helpful.

1. Have the team, as a group, write a simple summary of what happened. How did your predictions play out?
2. Have members reflect on what they learned about the effectiveness of this change idea, as well as the responses of students (or others for whom it had impact).
3. Capture this information on the PDSA form.

Considerations

- Is the change resulting in the hoped-for improvement?
- Have you tested the same change enough times that you are confident of its reliability?

Act

In this segment of the PDSA cycle, have the team decide what to do next.

1. If it seems that the change in practice was thoroughly successful, you will ADOPT it and begin to consider how to scale the change across contexts. For example, you may wish to begin implementing the change in a different grade or school, being sure to collect data on its effectiveness in different contexts. (See step 2.13: Create a scaling plan.)
2. If it seems that minor revisions to the change are needed, you will ADAPT it and test it again. This decision is usually made when you see that the change has had promising results but also see that you could achieve better results if you made a simple modification to the change.
3. If it seems that the change yielded poor results, you will ABANDON it.
4. If you conducted the test but think you need more information to decide on the next step, you may want to REPEAT the test without modification.

Consideration

- Would others be able to replicate the change in new contexts?

Taking action after the meeting (60+ minutes over a week or two, depending on the outcome of the data analysis)

1. Help the team organize testing of additional change ideas or modifications to change ideas, using the PDSA form to plan, study, and analyze each test.
2. Schedule data-analysis meetings every couple of weeks to reflect on what happened in the tests. A new PDSA form should be completed for each test.

PDSA form—Study and Act sections

After you try your change idea, study.

What actually happened?	Summarize findings and results here.
What did you learn from trying this change idea?	

Then, act.

What will you do next?	Adapt, Adopt, Abandon, or Repeat? Is there anything more that you need to learn before you decide on next steps?

Tool 5. PDSA form—Plan, Study, and Act

Main Contact Person: ______________________ Date: ____________

Team Member Names: ______________________

____

Before you try your change idea, plan:

Identify the change idea.	Which change idea will we test?
Plan to test the change idea.	Who will do the testing? With whom will it be tested? When? Where?
Identify the goal of this test.	What do we want to learn from the test?
Decide how we will know if the change leads to improvement.	What data will we collect and analyze? (Consider collecting quantitative and qualitative data.) Who is going to collect it? How?
What do you predict is going to happen?	How will it go? Who will participate enthusiastically? Who will not?

***** Do: Implement the change *****

After you try your change idea, study.

What actually happened?	Summarize findings and results here.
What did you learn from trying this change idea?	

Then, act.

What will you do next?	Adapt, Adopt, Abandon, or Repeat? Is there anything more that you need to learn before you decide on next steps?

2.14 Consolidate your learning

Associated NM DASH component

Component 6: Implement Plan and Monitor Progress

Description and purpose

This step may be taken after several changes have been planned and tested in PDSA cycles, or after a single PDSA cycle if the team is large and is testing several change ideas at once.

At certain points in the testing cycles, your team will want to come together to consolidate learning on what has been working, for whom, and under what conditions, in the same way that you did during your initial systems investigation. If the team is simultaneously running multiple PDSA cycles, you will want to make time to work together to try to better understand and synthesize what you have learned about the performance challenge and about your changes in practice to address it. Revisiting your theory of improvement and assessing whether any modifications are needed, based on your findings, will also be necessary.

Helpful hints

- Consolidating learning with your team enables all team members to reflect on what you have done, where you are now, and how you got there.
- If teams find that the results from the PDSA cycles are inconsistent across cycles, teachers, or classrooms, make room for this discussion in steps 3 and 4 of the learning consolidation protocol on page 61. Consider and discuss what may explain the inconsistencies or differences in the findings. For example, whether different student assessments were used or whether the students in the PDSA cycles were in different grade or skill levels. Consider what data collection tools were used by different team members, when the data were collected, and other conditions in the classroom that may explain the inconsistent findings. You may consider whether the change idea works in certain classrooms or settings, or for certain students. As your team consolidates learning, note what you learn from discussing any inconsistent findings from your tests.
- Consolidating learning is an important activity because it gives the team time and space to consider the many variables that affect the improvement work you have undertaken.

Staying focused on English learner students

Ask questions about specific impacts on English learner students, such as:

- Have you noticed changes in learning behaviors as a result of these changes?
- What are the implications for instructional practice?
- Have there been any negative trends that the change may have caused for English learner students?

Steps in consolidating your learning

Preparing for meeting (30 or fewer minutes)

1. Schedule, prepare an agenda, and gather materials (including completed sections of the PDSA form) for the upcoming meeting.

Meeting to consolidate learning (60 minutes)

Conduct a learning consolidation meeting every few weeks, as necessary.

1. Use the following learning consolidation protocol. As necessary, conduct learning consolidation meetings every few weeks.
2. As the team considers findings from its PDSA cycles—for one or more changes in practice—you will come to a point at which you are ready to make a decision about whether or not to scale the change(s). Raise this question in the learning consolidation meetings. If a change has been tested enough times with positive results to know that it reliably yields the desired outcomes, the answer is likely to be that the change should be scaled. At that point, it will be important to consider how to share the change or changes at scale in your school or district. See step 2.13 for planning how to scale.

Tool 6. Learning consolidation protocol

Roles:

Facilitator: ______________________

Timekeeper: ______________________

Note taker: ______________________

1. **Preparation.** (2 minutes)
   Assign roles and ensure that the note-taker takes or keeps notes in a place that all team members can access (for example, in a Google Doc or on a shared drive).
2. **Team members provide updates on their work.** (2 minutes each)
3. **As a team, reflect on your theory of improvement.** (5 minutes)
   Ask: Does our theory of improvement need to be updated?
4. **Group discussion: What have we learned so far?** (~15 minutes)
   Round robin—Each team member has 2 or 3 minutes to share their learning about the test(s) of the change idea(s). Possible guiding questions for team members: Which suggested practices have you been focusing on? What have you been testing? What have you learned about implementing changes aligned to this suggested practice?
5. **Knowledge consolidation.** (~15 minutes)
   Note-taker reads notes from step 3 to the group. What are our big learnings? What artifacts do we have? What needs updating (for example, theory of improvement)? Have the team decide who will make necessary updates.
6. **Reflection.** (15 minutes)
   a. **Individual writing.** (5 minutes)
      What did we learn? What does this mean for how we should focus our work moving forward? What questions do we have?
   b. **Group discussion/synthesis of learning.** (10 minutes)
      Team members share reflections and decide how/where to focus the work, moving forward.

2.15 Create a scaling plan

Associated NM DASH component

Component 6: Implement Plan and Monitor Progress

Description and purpose

Once the team has built confidence in a tested change, you will want to share it with your broader education community. A scaling plan will help you to integrate the new practice into the existing organization of your school or district.

Helpful hints

- Take a slow and steady approach to scaling, making sure to measure the outcomes of your implementation along the way.
- Be ready to explain your process, and how the change meets an overarching improvement goal, to those who are not part of your improvement team but will participate in your scaling efforts.
- It is especially important that teacher-led teams share their process for reaching goals with their administrators, to obtain leadership buy-in before scaling changes beyond the classrooms of the teachers on the team.

Staying focused on English learner students

- In scaling the change in practice, continue to talk with English learner students who are affected by the change. Learn from them how they are experiencing the change. Also talk with members of students' families about their own perceptions of how the change is affecting their student or the family. Document the findings to analyze as a team.

Steps in creating a scaling plan

Preparing for meeting (30 or fewer minutes)

1. Schedule and prepare an agenda for the upcoming meeting. Be ready to share the following scaling plan template available below.

Meeting to discuss and plan scaling (30 or fewer minutes)

1. Use the following scaling plan template to guide your planning.
2. Work through each row of the template together as a team, noting your progress to date and any challenges or remaining tasks for each attribute.
3. Revisit the scaling plan template each time you are ready to scale a change.

Tool 7. Scaling plan template

Considerations for Scaling—What is the change in practice that the team has tested with positive results and would like to scale?

Attribute	Progress to Date	Challenges/Still to Do
Ownership Who will own the scale-up? How will the owner engage other key leaders and team members?		
Plans What scale-up plans will be established, and how will they be monitored? What communication plans or agreements are in place to check in on scaling prog-ress and challenges?		

Attribute	Progress to Date	Challenges/Still to Do
Infrastructure What type(s) of infrastructure do you need for scale-up? How might the nature of the intervention change as you spread and scale it?		
Measurement How will you monitor the rollout? How will you record and aggregate data from the overall outcome?		

Part 3: Continuous improvement in action

The following hypothetical vignettes illustrate the continuous improvement process outlined in this guide. While the schools and teams are fictional, the vignettes are loosely based on improvement projects undertaken by New Mexico districts during a pilot implementation of this process.

The vignettes illustrate the continuous improvement process in action, at two different schools and with two different teams. Although the contexts of these schools and teams differ, the continuous improvement process itself remains consistent across the two contexts, as reflected in the process-related language in both vignettes.

Arroyo Elementary School site team

Arroyo Elementary serves K–5 students, 30 percent of whom are designated as English learner students.

The school's core team (for the NM DASH planning process) consists of the district's associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction, the site principal, the lead teacher for each grade level, a member of the parent advisory committee, the school's union representative, and the student body president. This core team established several student achievement goals as part of its 90-day plan developed through the NM DASH process, including one focused on English learner students: "We will increase the percentage of English learner students scoring at 'Proficient' and above on the statewide assessment in ELA, from 23 percent to 35 percent, by the end of next school year."

Assemble a team, designate a team coordinator, and prepare to engage in the continuous improvement process

To make progress on this student achievement goal, the core school team decides to create a smaller improvement team composed of the site principal, the grades 3 and 4 lead teachers, and two additional teachers (one each from the grades 3 and 4).[12] The associate superintedent of curriculum and instruction agrees to act in an advisory capacity and be available for questions and support, but not be a regular attendee at the meetings. The team designates Ms. Bowers, one of the grade 4 teachers, as the team coordinator.

At the team's meeting to kick off the continuous improvement effort, team members spend some time familiarizing themselves with *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* by closely reading the practices in the focus area of equity, access, and engagement and reviewing several of the resources aligned to those practices.

Conduct data analysis focused on English learner students

After adopting the core team's academic achievement goal for English learner students as its own, the improvement team sets out to learn more about the school's English learner students and their educational strengths and needs. Team members do so by analyzing the data from the ACCESS for ELLs student roster reports, using a data analysis protocol. That analysis helps the team identify that student writing proficiency scores are concentrated at the "Entering" and "Emerging" levels, but with a subset of students, across classrooms, scoring at the "Developing" and "Expanding" levels. The team then decides to dig more deeply into some classroom data by examining writing samples of selected students at different proficiency levels, analyzing the samples against the school writing rubric. The team learns that almost all students whose writing samples were examined, regardless of an individual student's overall proficiency level, scored the lowest on writing opinions. The team decides to focus its improvement efforts on that type of writing.

[12] While Arroyo has several teachers per grade level, engaging in improvement work is possible in smaller settings. For example, in a school with only one teacher per grade, a team may decide to work with just two teachers in a grade band spanning one year (such as grades 3 and 4) or may decide to widen the grade band to include more teachers (such as grades 3, 4, and 5). When considering grade bands for focusing on a single improvement effort, keep in mind student needs at different grade levels. For example, partnering across many grades (such as kindergarten through grade 5) would likely necessitate testing slightly different versions of change ideas in the earlier grades and in the later grades.

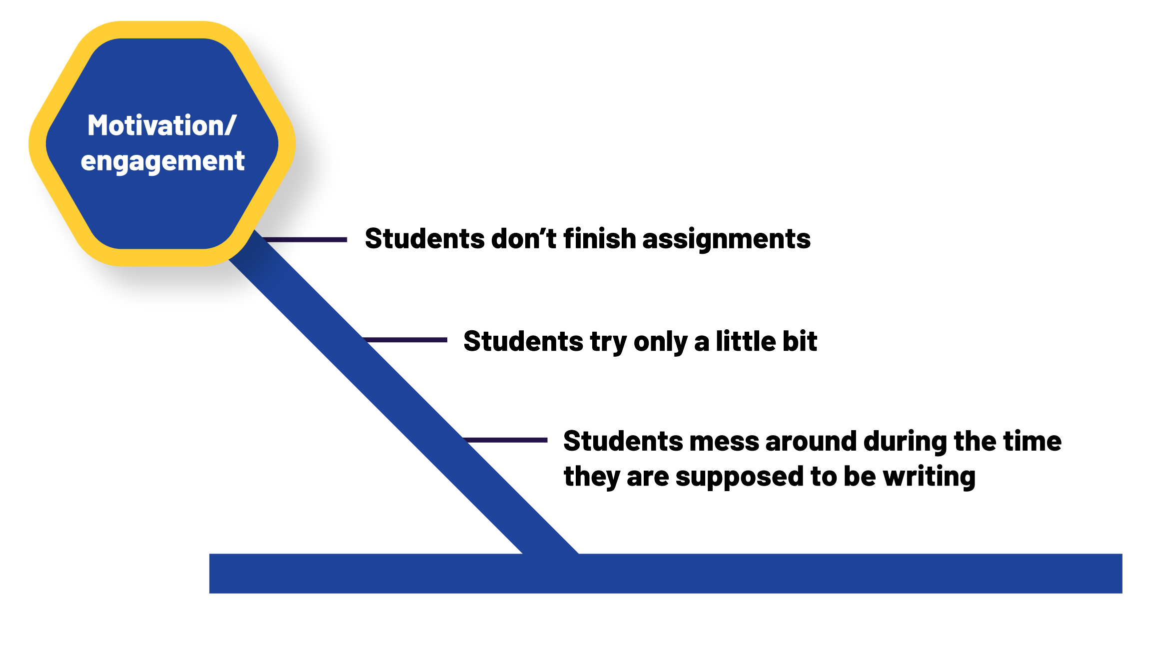
Write a performance challenge statement

After engaging in the data-analysis process, the Arroyo team establishes the following performance challenge: “Ninety percent of grades 4 and 5 English learner students at Arroyo score below the ‘Proficient’ level on our district writing rubric when writing opinions.” Importantly, concentrating on this performance challenge will help the team contribute to meeting the student achievement goal identified in the 90-day NM DASH plan, but because the opinion-writing performance challenge is at a smaller grain size, the team can more readily make progress on it, compared to the broader NM DASH goal.

Investigate causes of the performance challenge

The Arroyo team engages in an investigation to determine the causes of the defined performance challenge. It identifies many potential causes and categorizes them, capturing its work in a fishbone diagram. Among the potential causes are that students do not seem engaged in the writing prompts, and that students may need more scaffolding and support to know how to write opinion pieces proficiently. A segment of the team’s fishbone diagram is shown in the following figure.

Arroyo team fishbone diagram segment



The team decides to speak with several English learner students to determine, from a student's perspective, why students may not be fully engaged in the writing prompt and process. From their conversations with students, the team learns that the topics of the writing assignments feel irrelevant to students and do not connect well with their lives or interests. The topics that teachers use for the writing assignments come from a generalized writing curriculum designed to help students perform well on summative assessments, and typically ask students to take a position on a defined topic and support their position with evidence. Some of the topics that students refer to when asked about their writing experiences include whether schools should have bells and whether students should be allowed to chew gum in class. One student said, "We don't even have bells. It's kind of fake." After speaking to the students, the team concludes that some students feel disconnected from the writing assignments and do not feel engaged during writing instruction.

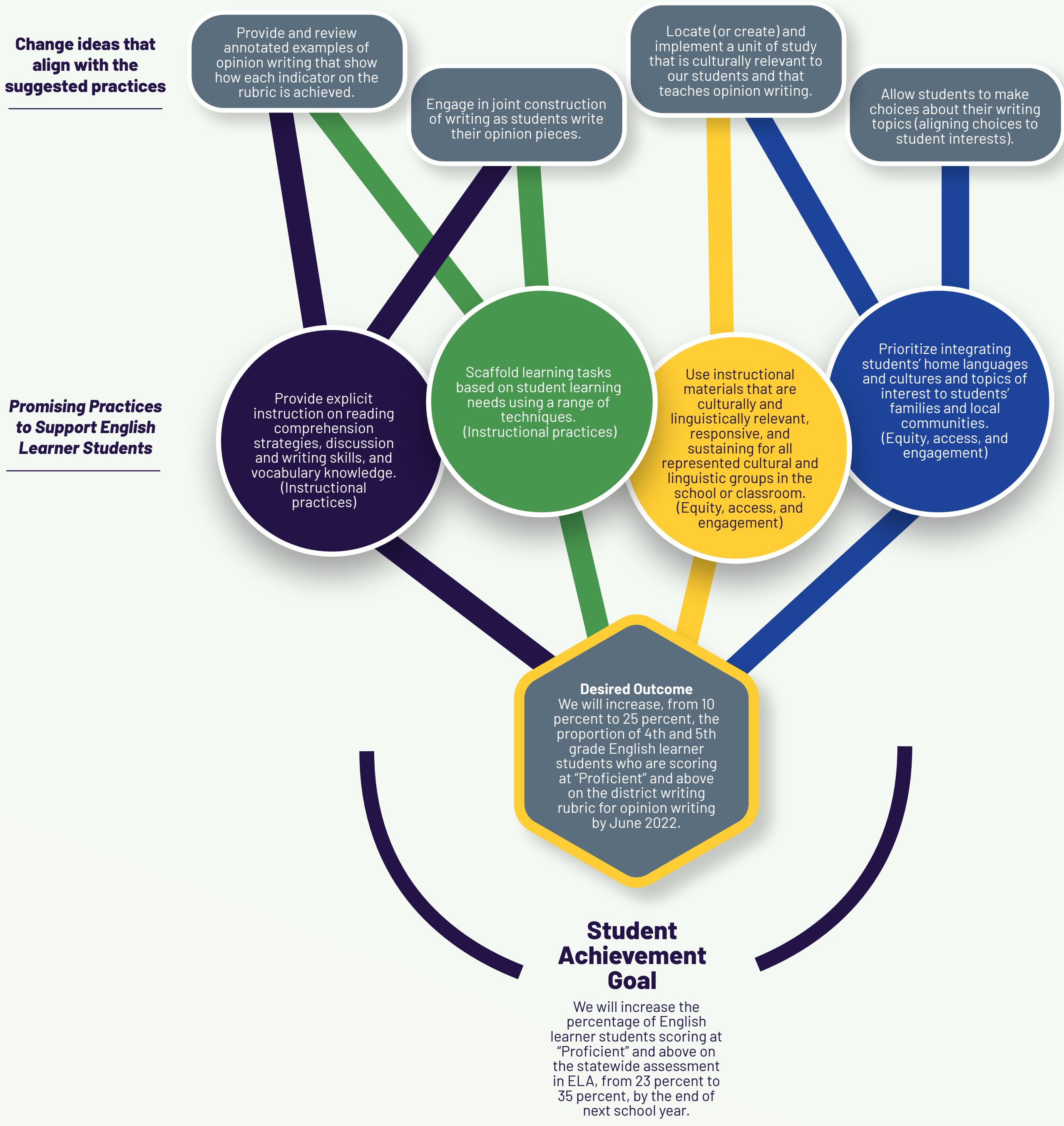
Craft a desired-outcome statement

Now that the team has analyzed data to identify a performance challenge, it works to develop a desired-outcomes statement that answers these questions: "What?" "For whom?" "By when?" "By how much?" After a rich discussion, the team agrees that an achievable desired outcome that meets the criteria of a SMART goal (that is, specific, measurable, achievable, results-driven, and time-bound) is to have an increase of 15 percentage points, by the end of the next school year, in the proportion of English learner students who score at least "Proficient" on the district's writing rubric when writing opinions. The team uses the desired-outcome statement template tool to craft the desired-outcome statement: "We will increase, from 10 percent to 25 percent, the proportion of 4th and 5th grade English learner students who are scoring at 'Proficient' and above on the district writing rubric for opinion writing by June 2022."

Develop a theory of improvement

Having defined a desired outcome, the Arroyo team begins to develop a theory of improvement, which involves direct interaction with *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students.* The team posts the desired-outcome statement where all team members can see it. With the desired outcome front and center, the team discusses the different factors that influence the performance challenge on which it is focusing. After referring to the focus areas in *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*, the team decides that if its desired outcome is to be achieved, change is needed in two of the focus areas: equity, access, and engagement and instructional practice. For each area, the team examines the teacher and leader practices that pertain to the desired outcome and identifies two practices for each focus area, to concentrate improvement efforts on. Team members then identify six specific change ideas that they think have the potential to move them toward the desired outcome (see the following figure) and are possible to test in a PDSA cycle in the next few months. Their next step is to choose which change to try—and test—first.

Arroyo Elementary School team's theory of improvement



After the Arroyo team considers the proposed change ideas, each member discusses how easily and quickly they might be able to try one of the change ideas. They know that they cannot test all of them at once, and that they may even have to understand more about each change idea in order to implement it well. They want to ensure that the change in practice is small enough in grain size to be easy to put into practice and easy to test. They also want to carefully consider any potential negative consequences if the change fails to result in progress; before implementing the change, they need to know that it is safe to fail, both in the sense that failure will not cause harm and that it is okay for them to try something new, even understanding that it might not be successful. They decide not to choose locating or creating a unit of study, because they are concerned about the level of effort needed for that change, and they are worried about the potential for the team to become discouraged after their first test. This change idea does not meet the criteria of being easy to implement and safe to fail.

Choose a change idea and define progress indicators

The teachers on the team are drawn to the change idea of developing writing assignments and prompts that are more relevant to their students' interests and lives. So, as the first change to test, they choose "Allow students to make choices about their writing topics (aligning choices to student interests)."

This specific change idea is related to one of the two broader practices that the team has pulled from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* to include in its theory of improvement: "Prioritize integrating students' home languages and cultures and topics of interest to students' families and local communities." To help them think more deeply about their specific change idea in relation to this broader practice, the team members turn again to *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*, this time to identify resources that align with the suggested practice. The team chooses to spend time reading, discussing, and reflecting on two resources aligned to the suggested teacher practice: "Equity Literacy for All" (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015) and *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction for American Indian English Learner Students in New Mexico* (NMPED, Language and Culture Division, n.d.). While the school's population of English learner students includes both native Spanish speakers and American Indian English learner students, the teachers feel confident that they can use both resources to bolster their own understanding of how to appropriately integrate into their instruction topics of interest to students, their families, and their communities.

After reading the two resources, the teachers recognize that they may not yet have sufficient knowledge of topics that their students feel connected to. To find out more about their students' interests, the team decides to have teachers use an exit ticket with a rank-order survey for students: "I am interested in learning more about and writing an opinion on:
__ a local hero; __ animal conservation; __ family cultural traditions;
__ something else (*students write in*)."

The team then begins discussing indicators of progress. They decide on three ways to measure whether the change is helping them move toward their desired outcome. They will calculate the completion rate for the more relevant, choice-based writing assignment, compared to completion rates for a previous writing assignment. They will ask a random sample of five students per class the following questions: "Did you enjoy this writing assignment more than previous writing assignment? Why or why not?" And they will use the school writing rubric to score the students' writing to see whether scores improved.

The next week, the teachers are ready to test their change idea in their classrooms. To adequately prepare for the test, the team completes the Plan section of a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) form.

Test the change

Identify the change idea.	**Which change idea will we test?** Creating a writing assignment and accompanying lesson that offer students a choice on topics relevant to our students and community.
Plan to test the change idea.	**Who will do the testing? With whom will it be tested?** Each of the four teachers on the team (two grade 3 and two grade 4) will test the change idea. We will meet during our regularly scheduled Thursday time (on 2/17) to plan out a week's worth of lessons on the writing assignment. Then, we will implement it on Monday through Friday of the following week (2/21–2/25), collecting data on completion and student perceptions on Friday. During our next team meeting (Thursday, 3/3), we will discuss the completion and student perception data, and use the school rubric to score the writing assignments.
Identify the goal of this test.	**What do we want to learn from the test?** We want to learn whether offering a choice of relevant writing prompts will lead to more student engagement in writing and to higher-quality writing.
Decide how we will know if the change leads to improvement?	**What data will we collect and analyze? (Consider collecting quantitative and qualitative data.) Who is going to collect it? How?** Each teacher will calculate the number of writing products considered complete. Each teacher will speak to five randomly chosen students on Friday, 2/25, and ask them: "Did you enjoy this week's writing topic more than others we have done? Why or why not?" On Thursday, 3/3, each teacher will bring their set of English learner students' writing products, and the team will score them on a rubric to see whether the quality of writing has improved.

What do you predict is going to happen?	**How will it go? Who will participate enthusiastically? Who will not?** We predict that more students will be interested in the writing prompts, but we also know that some students may not feel as comfortable because the topic may be one about which they have emotions. We also predict that a higher percentage (maybe 20 to 30 percent more) of students will complete the assignment. We are not sure whether the quality of writing will improve, since we are mainly focusing on the topic of writing and not concentrating so much on scaffolding better.

The team tests the change, as the “do” part of the PDSA cycle.

Analyze and act on data from testing

When the team comes together on March 3 after testing their change idea, they compare the data on the first two indicators, collected by teachers on the team: the number of writing products considered complete, and student responses to being asked whether—and why or why not—they enjoyed the topic more than past topics. Then, they take some time in the meeting to use the school rubric to score their students' writing products. They have tracked their data in a Google Doc so that they can easily capture and share their findings.

Teacher	Number and percentage of completed samples	Responses of students to the writing prompt	Scores on the writing prompt
Grade 3, Mr. B	7 out of 10 completed samples (70%)	Four out of five students reported enjoying the assignment more. Among the reasons cited were that it was more exciting and seemed realistic.	Of the 10 samples, 1 scored at the "Proficient" level; 5 scored at the "Approaching" level; and 4 scored at the "Beginning" level. No students scored above the "Proficient" level.
Grade 3, Ms. J	3 out of 6 completed samples (50%)	Three out of five students reported that they did not enjoy the assignment as much because it felt harder than others.	Of the 6 samples, none scored at the "Proficient" level; 2 scored at the "Approaching" level; and 4 scored at the "Beginning" level. No students scored above the "Proficient" level.

Teacher	Number and percentage of completed samples	Responses of students to the writing prompt	Scores on the writing prompt
Grade 4, Ms. D	9 out of 9 completed samples (100%)	Five out of five students reported enjoying the assignment more. Among the reasons cited were that students all got to talk about their ideas and that it was more entertaining.	Of the 9 samples, 1 scored at the "Proficient" level; 7 scored at the "Approaching" level; and 1 scored at the "Beginning" level. No students scored above the "Proficient" level.
Grade 4, Ms. P	6 out of 7 completed samples (86%)	Four out of five students reported enjoying the assignment more. Among the reasons cited were that it seemed easier and more fun.	Of the 7 samples, 0 scored at the "Proficient" level; 4 scored at the "Approaching" level; and 3 scored at the "Beginning" level. No students scored above the "Proficient" level.

After reviewing their data, team members use the PDSA form to guide their discussion and capture their reflections and next steps. Based on these findings, they decide to continue their focus on writing assignments that are more relevant to students' lives. They document what they have learned on the "Study" and "Act" portions of the PDSA form.

What actually happened?	Summarize findings and results here. Students completed the writing assignment at higher rates, compared to recent assignments, and most students reported enjoying the assignment. It's unclear whether the enjoyment led to the higher completion rates, but we can ask more about that in the future. Students scored marginally better against the rubric; performance is still nowhere near where we'd like it to be, though. This makes sense, as we focused this change idea on a new approach for designing the writing prompt itself, but we did not deliberately engage in more writing scaffolding.
What did you learn from trying this change idea?	We learned that introducing choice and more relevant assignments, building the writing process on the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students, does seem to help students enjoy the writing process more, and this may lead to higher rates of assignment completion. We also learned that some students found this writing process more challenging, due to lack of scaffolding. Ultimately, we feel that changing the nature of the prompt was successful, but we know we need to concentrate on more strategically scaffolding writing.
What will you do next?	**Adapt, Adopt, Abandon, or Repeat? Is there anything more that you need to learn before you decide on next steps?** As a next step, we will continue to integrate authentic purposes for writing and relevant prompts into our curriculum, allowing for student choice when possible. We are also interested in trying to integrate more-authentic topics in cross-disciplinary ways. For our next change idea, though, we will prepare more strategic writing scaffolding in the context of a relevant prompt.

Consolidate learning

The Arroyo team launches PDSA cycle 2, sharing findings every other week. They use the learning consolidation protocol tool to discuss findings and next steps. Each time they meet, they make an adaptation to the previous change idea. In this way, they improve their changes, based on what they learn from the indicator data they collect. Ultimately, they are able to fine-tune their process for establishing writing prompts that are personally meaningful to students, scaffold and differentiate the writing task, and evaluate it with a shared rubric. They are now ready to share the process with other Arroyo teachers.

Create a scaling plan

To establish standard practice, Arroyo team members work together to complete a scaling plan as they consider how best to share their now fully tested writing practice. They survey and talk to students about how students have experienced the new writing process, and they plan to share their findings with the other teachers. In addition to sharing the writing instruction practice, the improvement team members prepare to share the continuous improvement process that they used, so that others can understand the effects of the new process.

Piñon Middle School teacher team

Piñon Middle School serves students in grades 6–8, 50 percent of whom are designated as English learner students.

Assemble a team, designate a team coordinator, and prepare to engage in the continuous improvement process

After Piñon's core school team has drafted its first 90-day plan as part of the NM DASH process, the school's grade 7 content-teacher team feels motivated to engage in an improvement process to make progress toward the core team's student achievement goal for English learner students: "We will increase, by 50 percent, the percentage of English learner students who move from the 'Entering' and 'Emerging' levels of proficiency on the ACCESS for ELLs to the 'Developing' level (or above) by the end of next school year."

The improvement team is composed of the school's four grade 7 academic teachers (language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science). Team members know their site leadership is overextended at the moment and is less able to support them than anyone would like. The team approaches the site principal and discusses its plans with her. She requests that the team check in with her every few weeks and ensure that their project aligns with the school's student achievement goal from the 90-day plan. The team elects Ms. Baca, the science teacher, as the team coordinator.

At the team's meeting to kick off the continuous improvement effort, team members spend some time familiarizing themselves with *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* by reading closely the practices in the focus areas of Instructional Practices and reviewing several of the resources aligned to those practices.

After articulating its student achievement goal for English learner students, the improvement team identifies and begins to collect the data that will help them analyze their overall system for serving English learner students—an important early step in unpacking how to meet the team's achievement student goal.

Conduct data analysis focused on English learner students

Team members first complete a data analysis, using their grade's frequency ACCESS for ELLs report. From this, they learn that, overall, student scores in listening and reading were higher than those for speaking and writing. They then begin to analyze each English learner student's individual score report, dividing the reports among themselves. They complete a second data analysis protocol, using the individual score reports as the data source. The students' ACCESS for ELLs scores in writing, overall, were lower than for other strands (for example, reading), indicating a particular need in that area. One teacher, noting that the school as a whole is focused on writing and, thus, uses a defined process for teaching writing across the curriculum, expresses concern about being able to innovate within that defined process. Another points out that scores on speaking skills were also lower than scores on the interpretive skills of reading and listening. With these findings in mind, the team decides to focus on supporting English learner students to improve their academic speaking skills.

To understand more about students' opportunities to practice academic speaking in grade 7 classrooms, the teachers decide that they will each take a day to shadow one of their English learner students, keeping track of how much time, in minutes, the students spend engaging in extended academic speaking opportunities, which the team defines as being more than a single back-and-forth exchange and being focused on an academic topic. After collecting those data, the team calculates the total number of minutes that students engaged in extended academic discourse and divides it by the total number of classroom minutes observed. The team's data collection and analysis reveal that, during team members' observations, English learner students engaged in extended academic discourse less than 2 percent of the time.

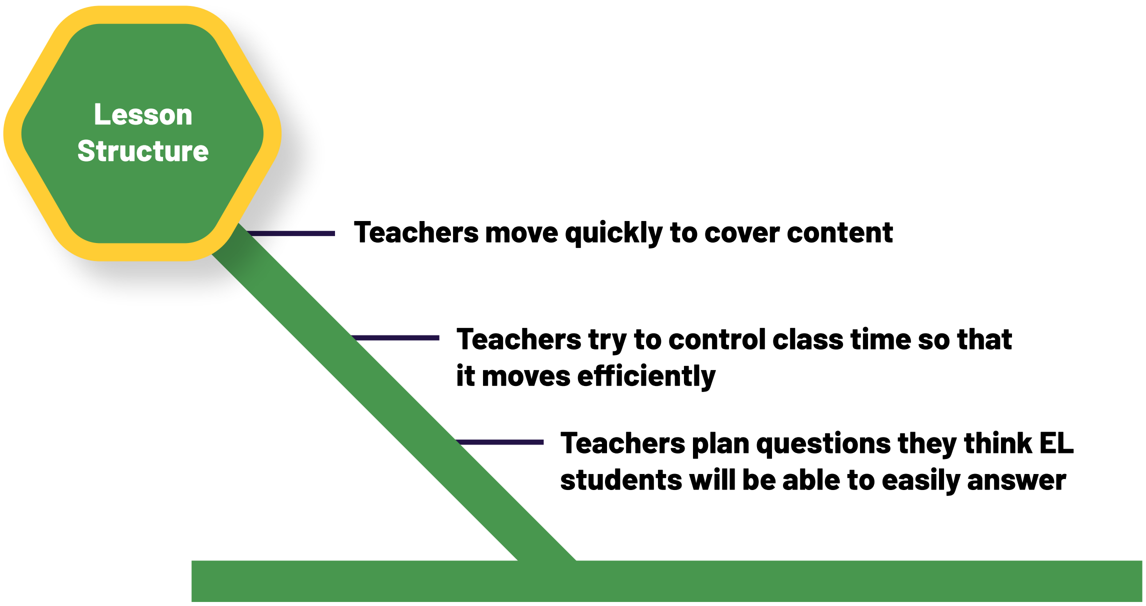
Write a performance challenge statement

After the data analysis, the Piñon teacher team establishes the following performance challenge: “Seventy percent of grade 7 English learner students at Piñon score at the ‘Developing’ level or below for speaking on the ACCESS for ELLs English Language Proficiency Test.”

Investigate causes of the performance challenge

The Piñon teacher team engages in an investigation to determine the causes of the performance challenge it has identified. The team determines many potential causes of the performance challenge and categorizes them, capturing its work in a fishbone diagram. Some of the potential causes are that, in order to “cover” content, teachers feel the need to move quickly—at a pace too rapid for some students to learn the skills and content—and that they ask easier questions of this population, in an effort to help the students feel a sense of confidence. A segment of the team’s fishbone diagram is shown in the following figure.

Piñon teacher team fishbone diagram segment



After engaging in the data analysis and an investigation into causes of the performance challenge, team members realize that teacher talk overshadows student discourse in the classroom, and that questions posed to students are at a low level of cognitive complexity, which may result in students having insufficient opportunities to practice using academic language to speak with one another. The teachers acknowledge that they feel very real pressure to move through curricular materials at a rapid pace, but that pace may not be conducive to deep and rich learning, especially for English learner students.

Team members request a meeting with the site principal and express their concerns about what might be behind the performance challenge they have identified. They share with the principal the student performance data and explain their efforts to investigate the causes of the performance challenge. The principal asks the team to discuss with her any changes with their lesson planning process or content. She also expresses support and appreciation for their thoughtful analysis of the problem and their willingness to work strategically to make progress on the school's student achievement goal by addressing the performance challenge they have identified.

Craft a desired-outcome statement

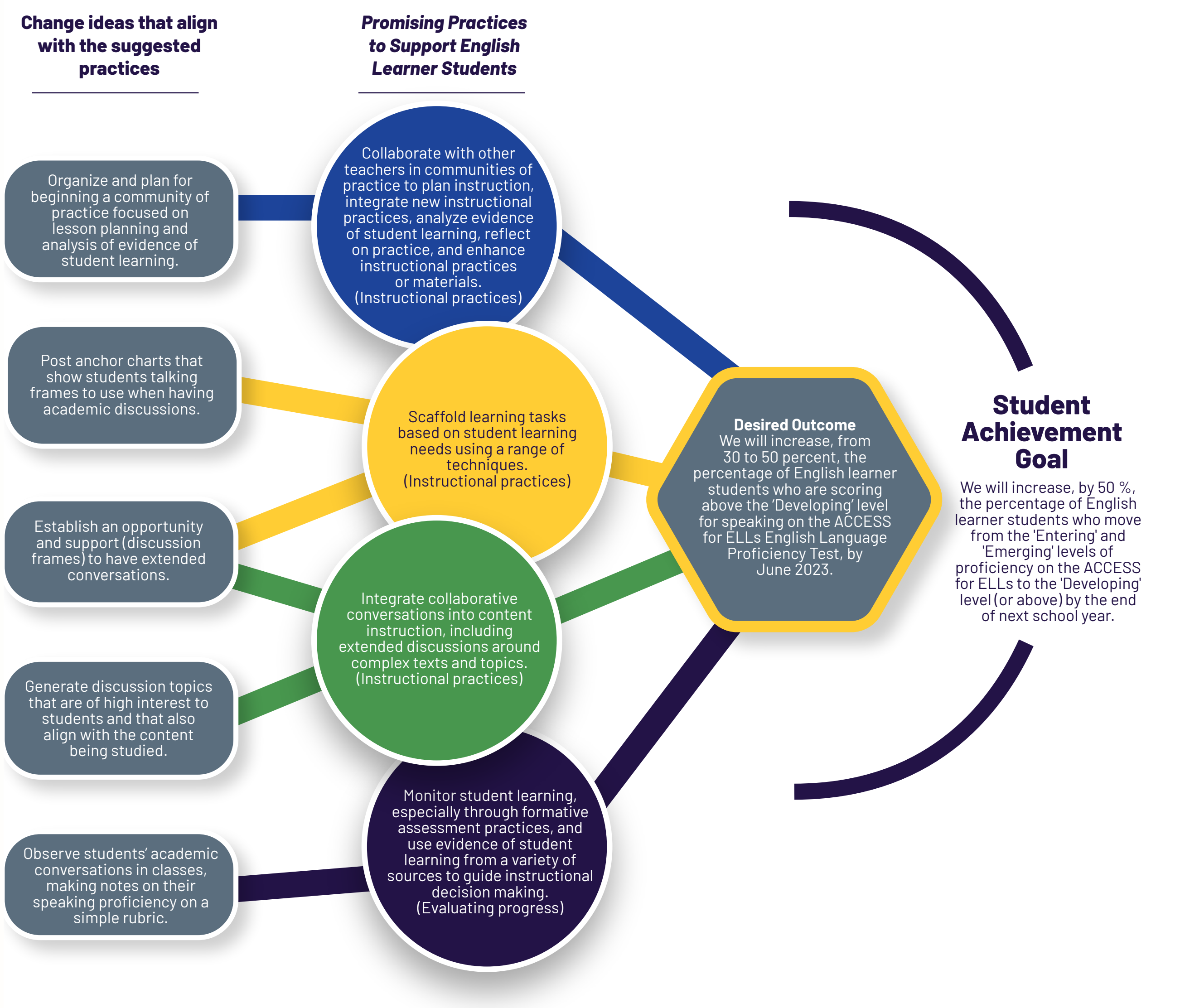
Now that the Piñon teacher team has analyzed data and identified the English learner student performance challenge it wants to address, its members work to develop a desired-outcome statement that answers these questions: "What?" "For whom?" "By when?" "By how much?" The team agrees that an increase of 20 percentage points in the number of students scoring above the "Developing" level on Speaking in ACCESS for ELLs by the end of the next school year (June 2023) is an achievable desired outcome and meets the criteria of a SMART goal (that is, specific, measurable, achievable, results-driven, and time-bound). Using the desired-outcome statement template, team members craft a desired-outcome statement, which is more specific than the school's overall achievement goal for this student population: "We will increase, from 30 to 50 percent, the percentage of English learner students who are scoring above the 'Developing' level for speaking on the ACCESS for ELLs English Language Proficiency Test, by June 2023."

Develop a theory of improvement

Having defined a desired outcome, the Piñon team is ready to think through its theory of improvement. With its desired outcome for English learner students in mind, the team discusses the different focus areas in *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* that are most likely to influence the performance challenge. After digging into *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*, team members decide that changes in two of the four focus areas—instructional practices and evaluating progress—are most likely to help them achieve the desired outcome.

For each of the two identified focus areas, the team examines and picks four suggested teacher or leader practices from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* and then brainstorms, for each of the four broader practices, some change ideas that are more specific and more focused. Critical to their choice of change ideas is their belief that the changes can be implemented and tested over the next few months and seem to have the potential to move them toward the desired outcome (see their theory of improvement in the following figure).

Piñon Middle School teacher team's theory of improvement



Choose a change idea and define progress indicators

After reviewing and discussing their proposed change ideas, the team members quickly decide on what they see as the most obvious idea to try first. Given what they have learned about the system, they choose the change idea "Establish an opportunity and support (discussion frames) to have extended conversations," which aligns to two practices from *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*: "Integrate collaborative conversations in content instruction, including extended discussions around complex texts and topics," and "Scaffold learning tasks based on student learning needs using a range of techniques."

The team then looks through many of the associated resources in *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* and decides to plan its change based on information in the resource *10 Key Policies and Practices for Teaching English Language Learners*, from the Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk (2018). Team members focus on practice 8 in that resource, "Teachers provide structured opportunities for [English learner students] to engage in peer discussion about content." They decide to establish structured partner discussions in their classrooms, with discussions focused on the content they teach. They each use the following tips from that resource, which include a sample discussion frame (fourth bullet) to set up partner discussions:

Tips for Structuring Partner Discussion

- Provide a prompt for a brief "turn and talk" discussion.
- Give clear directions for Partner 1 and Partner 2. (Optional: Establish Partner 1 as the peer with slightly more developed language proficiency to serve as a model for Partner 2.)
- Ask Partner 1 to go first most of the time. Partner 2 should listen and respond.

- Structure Partner 2 responses, such as the following:
  - **Repeat:** “My partner, Alex, said that _________.”
  - **Agree or disagree:** “I [agree/disagree] with Alex that ______ because ______.”
  - **Provide examples:** Partner 1 states the concept and Partner 2 provides examples from the text or from experience.
  - **Elaborate on the idea:** Partner 2 provides more detail to what Partner 1 said.
- Establish peer feedback routines. Give clear directions regarding feedback so that it focuses on the task, states positive aspects, and makes suggestions.

In addition to selecting the first change idea to test, team members identify three progress measures to use in tracking results of the change test: the number of students using the discussion frame each day, during each class, for a week; the quality of the responses, using a 1–5-point scale; and the amount of time in which students were engaged in academic discusv sion during each class period. For the first cycle, they plan to track this information over five classes (each day for a week).

Test the change

In preparation for testing the change, the Piñon teacher team uses the PDSA form to help them plan for a successful implementation. Before implementing the change, team members, collectively, complete the Plan section of a PDSA form, as shown below:

Identify the change idea.	**Which change idea will we test?** In each period, structure an extended academic conversation focused on the content currently under study, partnering students strategically so that one partner has a higher level of English proficiency than the other. Each extended conversation will include no fewer than two back-and-forth interactions.
Plan to test the change idea.	**Who will do the testing? With whom will it be tested? When? Where?** Each of the four teachers on the team (the grade 7 ELA, math, science, and social studies teachers) will test the change idea. We will meet during our regularly scheduled planning period (on 2/17) to plan out structured academic conversation interactions for the week, including developing anchor charts that provide discussion frames for students. Then, we will test it out on Monday through Friday of the following week (2/21–2/25), collecting data on the number of students participating in the interactions, the percentage of time that students spent discussing academic content with peers, and the quality of the sentences used, on a scale of 1–5. During our next team meeting (Thursday, 3/3), we will discuss the data we collected. We will track this on a spreadsheet that can be either printed out and written on or used on the computer.
Identify the goal of this test.	**What do we want to learn from the test?** We want to learn whether structuring academic discussions in classrooms leads to higher-quality academic discussions among English learner students.

Decide how we will know if the change leads to improvement?	**What data will we collect and analyze?** (Consider collecting quantitative and qualitative data.) Who is going to collect it? How? • Each teacher will count the number of English learner students actively participating in the discussion frame each day. • Each teacher will circulate during the academic discussions and tabulate the quality of discussions on a simple 1–5-point-scale rubric. • Each teacher will ask their student aide to calculate the number of minutes of class time that students were engaged in academic discussion.
What do you predict is going to happen?	**How will it go? Who will participate enthusiastically? Who will not?** • We predict that all students will at least attempt to engage in the discussion. • We also predict that the quality of student conversations will improve over the week. • We are not sure whether quality of discussion will improve when students are not using a discussion frame.

The next week, the teachers from the team test their change ideas in their classrooms, as agreed, and collect data on the progress indicators.

Analyze and act on data from testing

After five days of testing, the teachers document their findings in a simple data collection table such as the following table.

Piñon improvement team data collection table

Piñon Teacher	Number of English learner students using discussion frame at least once per day	Quality of sentences during peer discussion, on a 1–5 scale Monday & Tuesday average/Thursday & Friday average	Average number of minutes that students engaged in academic discussion (out of each 50-minute period)
Social Studies teacher	9 out of 11	2.5/3/9	23 minutes
Math teacher	8 out of 11	1.9/2.7	7 minutes
Language Arts teacher	10 out of 11	3/3.3	35 minutes
Science teacher	10 out of 11	2.7/3.5	20 minutes

The team returns to the PDSA form to summarize their findings and results and to agree on next steps. All four teachers note that, by the fifth day, students were engaging in the discussion structure with greater ease than when they had started. As students became more familiar with the frame, the quality of their responses also improved. In addition, the teachers note that the use of the discussion structure and peer discussion increased the amount of time that students were speaking in class, therefore decreasing teacher talk time.

The teachers are now in a position to make a decision about next steps, based on what they have learned and what more they need to learn. Will they repeat the test? Will they adapt it by making minor adjustments? Will they adopt this practice (and move toward scaling it to other teachers)? Or will they abandon it because it does not seem promising?

Based on their finding that students seemed to use the discussion frame with more ease and that their use of it increased over time, the teachers decide that they want to adapt this test by altering the discussion frame to make it increasingly more open-ended, so that students begin to structure their conversations more naturally when speaking in class.

Consolidate learning

The Piñon team launches a second PDSA cycle, returning to share findings every other week. Team members use the learning consolidation protocol tool to discuss findings and next steps. Each time they meet, they further adapt and improve the change idea, moving from creating discussion frames that are more open-ended to fine-tuning the rubric used to assess quality discussion. They are satisfied when they have created a curricular package that includes multiple versions of discussion frames for different content areas, associated rubrics, and tracking documents. They are now ready to share the process with the grades 6 and 8 teacher teams at Piñon.

Create a scaling plan

Excited about their successes, the team members meet with the principal, share the findings of their work, and present the idea of sharing the successful practice beyond their grade level. The principal agrees, and the team plans the details of how they will share their work and learnings with the grades 6 and 8 teacher teams by completing the scaling plan template. Team members survey and talk with students about how they have experienced the discussion frames. Student feedback becomes part of the team's body of data. The team's scaling plan includes having the team coordinator, Ms. Baca, attend a meeting with teachers from grades 6 and 8 to share findings and demonstrate how the discussion frames work. During the meeting, Ms. Baca also shares promising results and challenges, and presents findings on how the students experienced the discussion frames.

Final thoughts

Thank you for your hard work and dedication in supporting your English learner students by engaging in the continuous improvement approach described in this guide. The development team views this guide and the accompanying *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students*, together, as a critical piece of the ongoing statewide effort to ensure equitable outcomes for English learner students. We also see these materials as living documents that will evolve over time as you and your colleagues engage in the continuous improvement process and begin to share valuable insights, lessons learned, adjustments, and innovations. We look forward to hearing the stories of your engagement with this guide and with *Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students* and leveraging your experience and wisdom for the benefit of educators, students, families, and communities across New Mexico.

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